April

25¢

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Good Stories Well Told

Three Complete Novelettes:

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by William Merriam Rouse

"West India Lights"
by Henry S. Whitehead

"The Moccasin's Mate"
by Haynes Trebor

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None of these stories is in the least alike. All of them are unusually well told, with the kind of climax that sticks.

LOOK for the May issue of

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MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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ROBERT SIMPSON, EDITOR

Volume XI Number 1

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Around the Corner

LAST month on this page, it was asked: what is a really good story? And an answer to the question was promised this month. Of course, no one is likely to agree with us, but we are going to keep our promise just the same.

A really good story is a story that is complete and satisfying in all its parts. It should be fundamentally simple in style and construction, and should at all times preserve the illusion of reality.

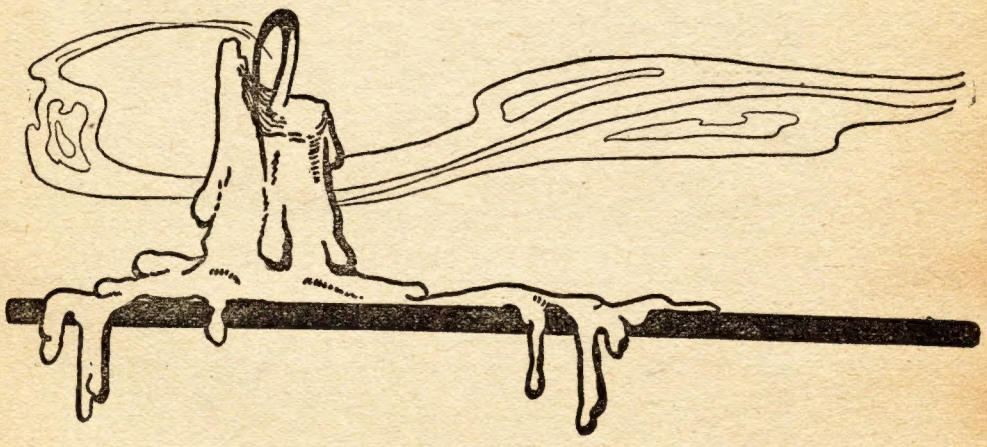
If the thing an author wants to say is more important to him than the style he employs; if style is more vital than construction; if construction so absorbs him that he forgets the lights and shades of character and if the characters he is portraying make him oblivious to style and construction and to the story he really started out to tell, he won't write a really good story.

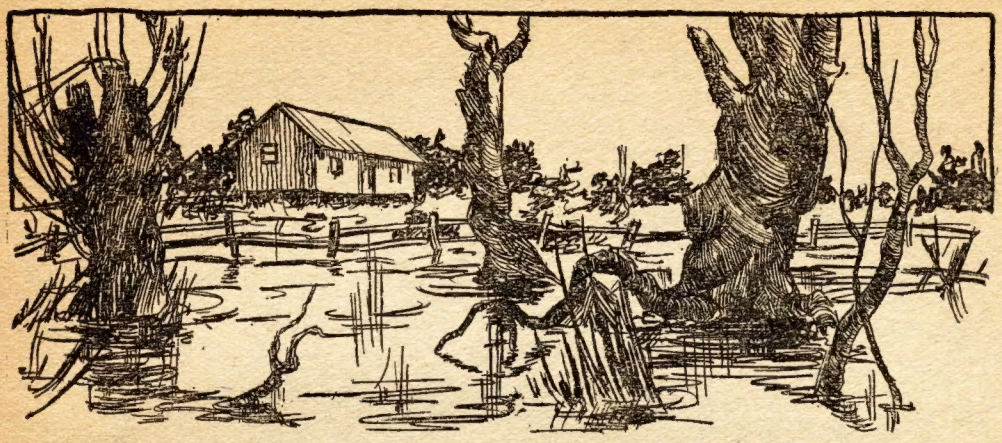
Because a really good story is a perfect co-mingling of all these things; of style, construction, plot and character, and theme so interwoven that, while "the people of the play" and the things they do and think appear to be all important, they are really made thus prominent only because the mallet and chisel of style and construction have hewn them into such relief.

There is no royal road to perfection of this sort. The highway to any throne worth while is always long and dusty.

So that when you read a particularly good story in Mystery Magazine, which frankly prides itself on the quality of the stories it prints, you can be reasonably sure that behind that good story are years of patient effort learning how.

THE EDITOR.





The Moccasin's Mate

By HAYNES TREBOR

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

Men and women, when stripped of the thin veneer of civilization, return to the elemental emotional reactions of their savage ancestors.

In this story of the southern swamp country, Haynes Trebor—with merciless detail and yet with a real beauty of understanding—bares the primeval urge which is in all of us to protect our own.

CHAPTER I

DIPPING

GALE ANDERSON was the arbiter of about everything the social life of the swamp country around Bayou Sarah contained.

His judgment largely determined the styles because the majority of the inhabitants of the section ordered their clothes through Gale's general store. What Gale's establishment did not have in the way of household goods and fancy foodstuffs was not to be had along Bayou Sarah, for few possessed the courage and ambition to embark upon extensive shopping tours to such distant villages as Chunchula or Satsuma, which were on railroad lines.

As a matter of fact few, if any, of the inhabitants of the swamp country felt the need of anything beyond what Anderson could furnish them in exchange for the trading stamps of the turpentine camp or the limited cash or the "goods in trade," skins and the like, with which a native of the backwoods might be provided.

Anderson lent money occasionally—but not very often—with more sagacity and less formality than any banker at Mobile.

That was because Gale knew his environment. Gale Anderson knew the swamp country and all that it contained as no other human being may ever know it.

Gale knew the people and he understood them. And the folks in

the section knew that Gale understood them, and therefore trusted him and looked upon him as a friend.

His business enterprises included whatever was offered him; Gale was the business representative of every swampster, whether he offered only the disposal of a dozen raccoon pelts a year and the sale of ten cans of molasses, or a more pretentious undertaking. . . .

Gale Anderson hated and feared the swamp because he knew it!

IT WAS winter, which was reason enough for the big cast iron heater in Anderson's store to be going, although it wasn't particularly cold outside. It was a sunless, damp day, however, and a sharp wind was blowing. The men who entered the store and joined the circle about the stove, or made purchases, had their coat collars turned up.

Gale rocked back and forth on the up-ended box, holding his knees between his clasped hands, his eyes staring absently at the pile of pine shavings accumulating at Jake Green's feet.

"I killed a four-foot cotton mouth over beyond Fly Creek," Ollie Quinn was saying. "Never seen such a big snake—Lord, I reckin it wuz ez thick through as my arm."

"Yeah? Where wuz this, Ollie?"

"Yu know where thet trail leads through the swamp after yu leave thet woods road thet crosses the branch back of Brandell's place? Well, I wuz comin' through the swamp there—saw the thing layin' on a stump right in front of me, all coiled up and its mouth open a mile and them eyes watchin' me. . . ."

Someone nodded. "How'd yu kill it?"

"Chucked a heavy knot at it—knocked it off the stump and smashed it some, I reckin. Then I picked up a long stick and beat it to death."

Gale Anderson had raised his eyes and was looking at the speaker. "Yu ain't goin' back thet way t'night, are yu, Ollie?"

Quinn turned to the storekeeper with languid inquisitiveness.

" 'Spose so. Why?"

"Wouldn't ef I wuz yu."

"Why not?"

Jake Green spat into his shavings and licked the stains from the corners of his mouth.

"Oh, Gale's goin' to tell yu thet the mate o' thet moccasin will be waitin' there to get even with yu," he said.

"Thet!" Quinn's face lost the wonder. "Yu don't believe thet, do yu, Gale?"

Anderson shrugged.

"I wouldn't go around thet spot fer a spell, thet's all," he answered stolidly. "I ain't sayin' thet it is so—thet moccasin's fight fer their mates. . . ."

"Yu crazy, Gale."

"Maybe," he went on, unperturbed, "but I've known cases where it's happened. I ain't declarin' nuthin', but I've always heard thet ef yu kill a moccasin its mate will follow yu and kill yu ef it can."

THE DOOR of the store opened with a rattle of the galvanized washtubs hanging on the wall. The man who entered was as obviously a native of the swamp country as any of those sitting around Gale Anderson's stove.

He was ponderously wiry, habitually stoop-shouldered, lean-faced, with a skin of texture and appearance best suggested by sun-dried ooze, except in color; his hands were as roughly gnarled and scarred as a "light-wood" knot. His hair was black and course; the edge of his scraggly mustache was stained with coffee.

"Hello, Marcus."

Gale rose and moved toward the counter. The newcomer grunted a greeting to the storekeeper and included the loungers with a motion of his hand.

"Mornin', Gale."

The man went to warm himself by the stove for a moment and Anderson made a move to resume his seat.

"Want some o' thet new cloth yu jus' got from the city," Marcus Thorpe said. "Don't know what the name of it is—wife called it something."

"Yu mean cambric?"

"Reckin thet's it. Give me enough to make a dress. Jo's got the notion in her head she oughter have a new dress. Damn lot o' foolishness, but Maw sez she can have it."

"How much yu want, Marcus."

"How in hell do I know? Cut off a big enough piece to make the gal a dress. I don't know!"

Anderson went to the shelf and took down the bolt of cloth. Thorpe stood in front of the stove, his back to the heat and his palms opened outward on his hips.

Jake Green cut a fresh portion of tobacco from a plug he dug from his pocket and cleaned the blade on his sleeve.

"Yu goin' to dip yuh cattle, Marcus?" he asked.

A frown crossed Thorpe's face. His small, colorless eyes turned upon Green as if to rebuke him for the question.

"Dip? Of course I ain't. My cattle is all on range an' I reckin I ain't goin' to bother roundin' them up jus' to dip."

"Ain't yu milkin'——"

"Couple o' cows, one comin' in next month. The rest I'm just lettin' feed on woods grass. I aint goin' to dip, noways. Sam Farley had one o' his steers skinned up runnin' them through thet dippin' vat last week. Ain't goin' to have *my* stock cut up thet way!"

The storekeeper had measured out the cloth and cut it.

"Yu want anything else, Marcus?" he put in.

"Yeah, better give me a bottle o' thet chill-and-fever medicine yu got—same as thet yu sold me last time. Maw's still troubled with them chills."

The wind coughed a little as it whipped about the frame building. A voice sounded outside crying a sharp *"Gee!"* followed by the staccato crack of the ox driver's long whip as it whirled and recoiled over the backs of the trudging animals, and by the slow, muffled-thunder rattle of the ox wagon passing.

"Larry Devins got ten new yoke o' oxen," one of the stove-encircling group said.

"Yeah. I seen him starting gettin' out thet cypress timber over in the hollow beyond the turpentine camp yesterday."

THE conversation got back to its previous subject.

"I ain't so particular anxious to dip my stock myself," Green said loquaciously. "But yu seen thet notice thet's posted, ain't yu—'bout dipping?"

"What notice?"

The storekeeper wrapped Thorpe's purchase and placed it on the counter's edge. Thorpe nodded.

"Yu don't mind creditin' me fer thet, do yu, Gale?"

Anderson stroked his chin.

"Oh, I reckin not," he answered. "Guess it's all right, Marcus."

He made a memorandum in a tattered book and resumed his seat.

Thorpe turned to Green again. "What notice?" he inquired.

"There's one of them there—stuck on Gale's show case."

Thorpe moved slowly to the pla-

card and stood before it, gazing at it as one might at an object with which one was not familiar, and of which one was suspicious.

"What does it say?" Thorpe said, glancing over his shoulder at the men.

"Can't yu read it?"

One of the group got up and moved beside Thorpe. He scrutinized the thing for a moment.

"Why it sez thet 'notice is hereby given thet all cattle in this here county and this section must be dipped at least every two weeks, and thet an inspector will be at the vat on Thursdays fer thet purpose.' "

"Well. . . ."

"It states further," the reader went on, "thet failure to obey this notice will cause arrest to persons found offendin' and thet the fine—"

"Yu think I'm goin' to pay any attention to thet?" Thorpe spat viciously into the wood box as he returned to the stove. "Who's goin' to make anybody dip 'less'n they want to? Huh?"

He sniffed contemptuously.

"Thet ain't nuthin' but some of thet foolishness them politicians down in Mobile hatch up. *I* ain't goin' to dip"—as though that statement settled the question for the Bayou Sarah community, the county and the world at large.

"It's goin' to be hard to enforce any sech law," Anderson admitted.

"Hard? They ain't goin' to, thet's what. Who's puttin' out them notices, enyways?"

"The name's there at the bottom: 'Steve Prine, Deputy Inspector.' "

There was a visible change in Thorpe's whole bearing. A scowl appeared on his lean face, his lips curled from his teeth in a sneering smile; in his eyes was a stupid, animal-like antagonism.

"Steve Prine? Yu might know one o' them Prine's 'd git eny political job there wuz to be had. And this young 'un o' thet no' count tribe tellin' folks thet they got to dip their cattle in a vat every two weeks or git arrested! He better not come tryin' to make me dip or I'll . . ."

CHAPTER II

BY THE CREEK

STEVE PRINE was as alien to the environment of Bayou Sarah and the swamps as Marcus Thorpe was typical of it. Steve was still a youth, comparatively speaking.

His face had taken on some of that seriousness of premature middle-age, an inevitable mark of the swamp country; but Steve had a way of smiling now and then, abruptly and honestly, that removed the hardness.

This young man was a product of the swamps. But there sometimes happens that rare instance in which a victim escapes from the muck which slowly draws the lives of those people into the relentless bog of circumstance and environment.

Such a case has been Steve's mother. A tiny spark of that seemingly indomitable spirit which is given us at birth had been kept alive in the woman like a log kept glowing by the wind after the flames have died. With the characteristic stubbornness of her kind, the woman saw her son educated to the unbelievable degree of three years in high school.

It had been an effort, and the boy remembered with bitterness the inescapable revenge of the swamp, the sapping of life from the woman, leaving but a husk. . . .

PRINE checked the last drove of cattle in his book, stuck the pencil between the pages and stowed the book safely in his pocket. He saw that the gates in the runways and

outer pen, through which the cattle were driven into the vat, were fastened, and then set out on foot, following one of the roads made by the continued passage of wagon wheels and horses' hoofs that wind through the piney woods; always winding rough and uneven.

The deputy inspector walked slowly, his head bent, staring moodily at the sandy path. The sun was dropping behind the tops of distant pine trees, leaving a gathering dusk that was dismally cold.

Not knowing the swamp as well as Gale Anderson, Steve hated it; hated it, perhaps, more than he feared it. The obdurate quiescence of its people irritated him. Having gone even momentarily from that environment, he had achieved another plane, had comprehended new things, if but vaguely, which were disregarded by the swamp folk; he was inclined to be a little intolerant in his assurity of wisdom.

He took his job conscientiously, half raising from the sordidness that indescribable spark his mother had kindled in his soul. He believed in the necessity for the dipping of all live stock to stamp out the pestilent cattle tick; and he believed in the law: two points on which he was apt to find infallible variance on Bayou Sarah.

He turned aside from the road eventually, walking aimlessly in an indistinct footpath along the edge of the swamp. Steve was disgruntled; he realized that scarcely a third of the cattle owners had dipped that day, even in spite of his notice. Enforcing the law he realized equally as well to be difficult. His determination may have been incautious.

THE MAN did not see the girl, but she was aware of him the moment he leaped aside, startled, and swore. She saw him stare at the ground uncertainly a moment and then guardedly search about for something to use as a club.

She came closer as he found a piece of tree limb and beat the reptile, sluggish with the chilled atmosphere, until its head was a bloody pulp.

He looked up then and their glances met. Both paused a little confused. Steve spoke stiffly.

"Yu better look out," the girl said. "Its mate might be around somewhere. Them moccasins fights fer their mates."

The young man regarded the dead snake as something that had just come to his attention. He scratched his head and finally a smile spread over his face.

"I reckin not. Gittin' too cold fer snakes to be around very active now, anyway."

The silence fell again, and the two hovered by the dead moccasin, avoiding each other's eyes, not quite knowing what move was the proper one next. They had come together somewhat aimlessly and neither could think in which direction they were in most haste to go, nor what errand would be an excuse for an abrupt parting.

Steve couldn't deliberately turn back, but he felt that the girl's path lay somewhere in the direction in which he had been headed. Finally he spoke:

"You—you live hereabouts?"

She nodded without lifting her head and with a sweep of her arm motioned beyond the shallow creek a short distance away.

"Right over there," she answered.

"Could I—could I walk home with you—'less you got something to do?" Prine fumbled.

The girl blinked and reflected. She glanced at him.

"I reckin so. I wuz just walkin'."

They turned and started awk-

wardly toward the creek. Steve was somewhat taller than the girl and he hunched his shoulders in an effort to bring his eyes upon a level with her lowered face.

Leaves and tree branches rustled faintly as though they shivered from the chill. A lone bird blew from the swamp and was lost in the face of the sun.

"What's your name?" he asked suddenly.

The sun on her hair tarnished it slightly, stirring subtle iridescents of red and gold.

"Jo," was her answer.

"Jo?"

"Josephine—but I ain't ever called thet. Jo Thorpe."

"I'm Steve Prine," the man said. His mind went off on a tangent.

"Ain't your paw got some cattle?"

The question had the effect of disconcerting the girl.

"Yeah-h," she replied slowly, her face lifted so that she gazed at him. "Why? Yu buyin' cattle?"

"No."

"He ain't got nuthin' but woods breed."

"I know. Why ain't he dipped them?"

A perplexed frown. "Dipped? Reckin he don't want to."

"He's got to—the law says so."

"Huh? I don't——"

"Well, never mind. Yu tell yuh paw he ought to bring his stock in to be dipped next week."

"Yeah," she said, but light had not broken into her mind yet.

"I'm the deputy inspector here," Steve said briefly, as though he felt some additional explanation was required. "I've got to enforce the law."

THE GIRL appeared a bit nervous now. They had reached the creek which was crossed by a log thrown from bank to bank. She stepped on the end of the log, turned and faced him.

He stood at the end of the crude bridge, watching her retreating figure.

Progress over the log was slow and accomplished with both arms waving in the air for balance. The old tree trunk hardly stuck above the surface of the sluggish, muddy stream. It was partly covered with pond scum, wet and slippery; it was rotten, too, and creaked as the girl walked over it.

The lids of the man's eyes were narrowed as he watched her. The faint wind blew the girl's clothes close to her full, buxom form and tousled her loose hair. She wore a jacket, open at the throat.

Her hands were red and chapped, but the young man did not see this; her face was unusually regular in feature, free of the drooping lines that deepen and deepen until they dig like a web down to the very bone—marvelously rich in a vigorous color. The tightened muscles at the corners of her mouth only made her lips appear to be hiding a half gay smile.

Steve Prine saw her gain the opposite shore and start up the slight hill on the other side, near the top of which he could indistinctly make out the rough, clap-board house, with thin gray smoke leaking from the yellow clay chimney. With sensuous appreciation he retraced his steps down the narrow path.

After she had gone some distance the girl paused and looked back. She saw the figure of the man striding away in the distance.

She paused a moment, looking after him, and then went back to the creek and at a point a little way from the log which she had just crossed, gathered up the basket of clothes which she had washed there during the afternoon.

CHAPTER III

GREASE

JO FOUND her mother preparing supper when she entered the house.

"Yu been a terrible long time gittin' them clothes done," the woman said.

A pan of sweet potato pone was baking in the oven and the woman took it out to examine it, holding the edge of the pan with her apron as she spoke to the girl.

Jo did not answer, but placed the basket of wet clothes in a corner. "Yu ought to been here helpin' me with supper," Mrs. Thorpe went on. "Wuzn't no wood brought in. Stir them noddles."

The girl did as she was bidden. The "noodles" were humble deservers of that title. A favorite dish in the swamp country is a kind of flat biscuit dough cut into strips and boiled and served floating in fried pork grease.

AS JO stirred the contents of the pot her mind assumed a reflective mood. This scene, its identical counterpart, took place every night of her life.

Her mother cooking at the battered little stove, her father tramping in eventually—morose, his mouth foul even with his goodness, gulping the meal and leaving the dirty dishes, his heavy, clumping shoes leaving mud-stained floors wherever he stepped.

And always the dinginess about everything, always the touch of swamp mud, black and a trifle odorous with its decay. Always the sordid drudgery which left her tired at night.

She had a room to herself—a bare, cold, draughty room. The house was built with the main room at the front, containing the fire-place. This, her parents occupied.

A short porch, or "run," extended from that to the kitchen; stuck on this porch, against the main room, was her tiny, cheerless room. The smoky kerosene light gave her only enough illumination to see where she was laying her things when she undressed.

The hog fat was "frying out" in a skillet, popping and sizzling. The smell of it brought a faint nausea. For some time now Jo had come to feel a distaste for the greasy foods her mother prepared.

Grease. . . .

Sometimes at night she felt that it all lodged in her throat.

THE MOTHER had returned the potato pone to the oven and now she stood up, brushing the loose strands of hair from her eyes with a bony hand, her face flushed with the heat of the stove. Her eyes encountered the girl.

"My lands, Jo, what yu standin' there dreamin' about? Thet's stirred enough. Set the table. Yuh paw's liable to be here any minute now."

Dully the girl obeyed. She took the chipped, stained china from the shelf and set out the three places. Strangely her mind went back to that afternoon.

Something in the eyes of the young man as he stood staring at her beside the dead snake persisted in her thoughts. An unexpressed eagerness, the quiet flash of appreciation of something he saw, which he probably thought was unrevealed.

Probably every woman who is beautiful knows it; even those about whom hovers that promise that is in the rough, unfinished marble may have their suspicions aroused.

Jo had never contemplated the realization that she might be pretty; the human mind works through sug-

gestion and in the swamp there was little but ugliness suggested. Only occasionally one comes upon a flower, mud-spattered and illusively hidden, but covered with the veil of attractiveness.

MARCUS THORPE came upon the porch outside, scraped the mud from his shoes at the edge of the steps, and Jo heard him pouring water into the basin that was on the shelf, the splash of water as he threw it into the yard—and then he came in, hanging his slouch hat on the nail back of the door.

"Supper ready?"

"Just about, Marcus. Yu sit down and me and Jo'll take everything up."

The man dropped into the chair, tossing a bundle on the table.

"Here's that cloth yu told me t' git at Anderson's. Don't git no more ideas in yuh heads 'bout dresses soon, though."

"Thanks, paw," the girl murmured and unwrapped the bundle to inspect the cloth.

She held it against her. It was a motley pattern, but it was new and bright and smelled sweet. The touch of it thrilled her, and thoughts she was not aware of flashed through her subconscious mind.

"It's nice," she said.

"Paw's brought yu some more of thet chill tonic," Jo said, holding the bottle for Mrs. Thorpe to see.

"Yeah. Put it over there somewhere. Them chills been both'in' me a lot of late. Think I had one this evening'."

Marcus Thorpe ate noisily, hurriedly, and without speaking until his appetite had been nearly satiated. The two women helped themselves to the food after he had piled his portion on his plate. They ate more slowly, the older woman with that listlessness of one who never enjoys a meal.

After a few mouthfuls Jo laid her fork on the edge of her plate. Mrs. Thorpe glanced at her.

"Yu ain't feelin' well, Jo?"

"I'm all right."

"What's the matter yu ain't eatin' yuh supper?"

The man spoke with a full mouth, chewing as he uttered the words.

"Eat yu supper," he said.

"I—I ain't so hungry," the girl said, and closed her eyes to hide from them the grease in her plate.

THORPE drank several gulps of coffee and set the cup on the table with such a thud that the remains of the liquid sloshed over the top; he wiped the drippings from his mustache and sucked gustily to dislodge a morsel of food from his teeth.

"They're raisin' all sorts o' racket 'bout this dippin' business," he said, apropos of a finished meal and his family having to hear what he had to say about whatever topic his thoughts happened to be dwelling upon. "Stickin' up notices thet all stock in these parts got to be dipped ev'ry two weeks."

"Yu got to dip, ain't yu, paw?"

A smirk formed under the mustache.

"Me? They talkin' 'bout arrestin' and finin' fer not runnin' cattle through thet vat. I'd like to see anybody tell me I got to dip," he said.

"But he—the—the man said so," the girl went on.

The glaring eyes of the father were turned upon her.

"Who? Who sez so, an' what? What yu talkin' 'bout, Jo?"

The girl swallowed nervously before she found words.

"Why—why—he said his name wuz Steve Prine——"

The expression on the man's face checked her.

"Where yu seen Steve Prine," he demanded.

Jo saw that her mother was looking intently at her, though her gaze shifted now and then to the father. The woman made no effort to join the talk.

"Down at the creek," the girl replied hesitantly. "He looked like he wuz comin' this way."

Jo read the suspicious assumption on her mother's face.

"He told me to tell yu thet yu got to bring yuh cattle down next week an' dip. Said he wuz goin' to enforce the law——"

Thorpe laughed, low and gutturally.

"He did? A Prine tellin' me I got to do somethin' . . . "

The sneering smile vanished abruptly from his lips. His brows contracted. He brushed his plate back viciously; the knife and fork bounded from off it with a clatter.

"Don't yu ever let me hear of yu talkin' with Steve Prine, do yu hear? Ner any of his kind. He ain't fittin' to associate with decent folks—him an' his dippin' and smart talk about arrestin' folks. He comes from a dirty tribe. His pappy stole one of my hogs once."

Thorpe brought his fist sharply against the table.

"Ef I catch yu talkin' with thet Steve Prine I'll—I'll make yu mighty sorry. Ain't no gal o' mine . . .

"And somebody'll dynamite thet dippin' vat some night! If I catch him on my place, I'll kill him. I'll shoot him with buckshot!"

CHAPTER IV

OFFICIAL NOTICE

JO THORPE saw Steve Prine again. . . . And still again. . . .

First it was at Gale Anderson's store. There came a time as the days slipped by that they met down at the path beyond the creek. It was dangerous, in a way, for them to meet there. But they optimistically discounted the danger.

And for three nights the girl strained her eyes to sew on that new dress by the uncertain, flickering light of the kerosene lamp in the cold bedroom.

"We'll go down to Antioch," Steve had suggested. "The preacher's goin' to be there this Sunday."

It was both a good excuse for Jo to get away from home and to wear the new dress. Her eyes sparkled and her blood surged warmly when she saw that the man noticed the new dress and appeared to admire it.

Coming home from Antioch they came by the path over the creek. Prine kissed the girl for the first time. She almost slipped as she ran over the log.

BUT THE troubles of the deputy inspector were being accentuated. His notice of the dipping law was frankly ignored; the defiance of the people of the swamp was antagonistically obvious. And Steve Prine was determined that the law was to be obeyed.

He went into Gale Anderson's store on Tuesday and found the placard with his notice torn up and cast into the wood box beside the stove. Steve felt that some member of that group about the stove had torn the notice when they saw him coming, that behind their stoical faces was a facetious, sibilant gibe, an insolent, flouting grin. Anger rushed to his head as he brusquely made his purchase and went out, the stolidly hostile eyes following him.

Prine decided to show his hand. He drove to Chunchula and saw the deputy sheriff there.

The next day the deputy drove to the community along Bayou Sarah which centers about Gale Anderson's

general store and a turpentine camp. He stopped at the store and asked questions of Gale; and the exchange of glances among the loungers in the glow of the heater was significant.

"Thet Steve Prine's gittin' too smart fer these parts," was Jake Green's comment when the deputy had gone.

"Maybe *he* didn't get these summons sworn out," the storekeeper ventured.

"He's deputy inspector or some such here, ain't he? He reported them what ain't dippin'!"

The sheriff left a dozen or more legal documents with the inhabitants of the swamp country around Bayou Sarah before he drove back to Chunchula. The recipients were given the choice of dipping their stock on the following day or appearing in court to pay such fines as the law provided for the offense.

Sullen resentment flamed into virulent rage. . . .

WHEN the girl met the deputy inspector on the backwoods path late that afternoon there was anxiety in her face, a nervous apprehension in the appeal of her voice.

"Yu—yu hadn't ought to have done nuthin' like thet," she told him tremulously. "Yu hadn't, Steve. Folks here in the swamp don't like no sheriff nor law buttin' in their affairs, and they don't like yu noways. They don't want to dip."

The young man smiled.

"I don't care whether they want to or not," he said. "The law says cattle's got to be dipped and I been appointed to see that it's carried out I'm gettin' paid for that; I reckin I got to do it, ain't I?"

"Maybe, Steve. But—but yu don't know the folks here in the swamp. I'm—I'm afraid fer yu."

He laughed then and his fingers gently pressed her shoulders.

"You quit worryin' about me, Jo," he said. "I ain't afraid. They can't do anything."

"Yeah they can, Steve. I'm afraid, honest!"

"Don't be——"

"Paw's terribly wrought up 'cause he got a summons. Him an' Jack Thurston have gone over to Branden's. They'll think up some meanness to do to yu."

He caught her in his arms and kissed her. The girl struggled and drew away from him.

"I got to go now, Steve," she said a little breathlessly. "Maw's gittin' suspicious of me goin' down to the creek so much. And ef paw knew I wuz meetin' yu, he'd kill yu—he would, Steve. And me, too, I reckin. . . ."

Prine caught her arm as she started away. He held her a moment before he spoke again.

Then, "You ain't awfully happy here, are you, Jo?" he said.

She looked away from him.

"I been happy since yu came," she answered quickly.

"But if I went away . . .?"

A rapid intake of her breath, and she bit her lip as her eyes gazed into his face.

"Yu ain't goin'?"

A thought came to her then.

"Yu—yu ought to go, Steve. Yu better go tonight."

"It ain't because of that," he said. "I ain't goin' to run away. But I been thinking of gettin' a job somewhere else. You'd kinda be sorry if I went, wouldn't you?"

There was no answer. The dusk was gathering over the swamp and woodland like a hen over her huddled brood. A lonely frog croaked dolefully, and a cricket, awakened, stirred irritably.

"Would you go away with me, Jo?"—earnestly.

"I got to go home now, Steve."

She released her arm from his grasp and was hurrying away.

"I'll be here tomorrow this time," he called.

THE NEXT day was official dipping day. During the morning several men drove varying numbers of cattle into the pen and ran them through the vat. Scarcely one of them did it with an attitude that was not morose and sullen.

And in all, the number of cattle dipped was far less than on any previous day. The swamp country was throwing down the gauntlet to the law.

Early in the afternoon Marcus Thorpe appeared at the vat. With him was Jake Green and another man. Thorpe carried a short barreled shotgun under his arm.

The men gathered outside the fence of the runway for a time, silently watching a small herd of cattle being driven through.

Steve Prine stood in the runway at the far end of the vat where the cattle came out of the tank. Presently, when the last of the herd had gone through and Steve had let them out into the pen from which the owners could drive them away, and had checked them in his book, Thorpe climbed over the high parallel board fence and into the runway. The two men faced each other almost at the edge of the vat with its grayish liquid.

"I understand yu goin' t' make everybody dip today," Thorpe said.

"Yu're supposed to."

"I ain't dippin'."

Prine shrugged.

"You got your notice," he answered calmly.

"Yuh notice! I ain't goin' t dip my cattle now ner any other time, d'yu hear?"

"You can dip until five o'clock this evenin'."

"Yeah? Reckin yu goin' t' wait fer me! I want to see yu make me do anything."

Green and his companion crowded against the fence. The men who had come with the last drove of cattle came nearer to listen. Anticipatory grins spread over their faces.

"You can do as you like, Mr. Thorpe," the inspector returned. "You know the consequences——"

"Consequences? Yuh the one what might be thinkin' of consequences. Why, I been itchin' to put a load of heavy buckshot in yuh hide fer a long time. Ef I'd ever caught yu around my place, I'd 'a' done it, too. As it is, I reckin these parts have seen 'bout enough of yu. . . ."

Steve flushed angrily.

"This happens to be the property of the county you're on," he said brusquely. "And I'm an official; if you're totin' that gun for any reason it might be——"

Thorpe's face held a menacing leer. The muzzle of the gun raised a few inches and Thorpe advanced a step toward the other man.

"Yu might take advice," he said, "before yu gits the unhealthy kind——"

Steve Prine lunged, bringing the whole weight of his body against Thorpe as his fist crashed into him. Thorpe went backward, toppled on the brink of the vat, clutched the air wildly to save himself, and then went into the odorous, filthy solution that filled the vat. . . .

CHAPTER V

THE CHALLENGE

WHEN, late that afternoon, Steve Prine left the vat and started out along the woods road which had first brought about the meeting with Jo, his ire had risen

to a high pitch. It was not that Steve was afraid of what the swamp would do, but his anger was the same, had the same reaction, as fear.

The crisis had come: the swamp had given its challenge; the moccasin had shown its fangs. It was coiled and disturbed, its hatred and enmity had been irritated. It would strike. Of that Steve was sure.

He realized that his position in that section was at best a precarious one, an unenviable one. But the hissed warning of the moccasin only stirred his wrath: literally he was looking for something to kill it with. . . .

JO CAME to him hurriedly, running swiftly along the path to him. She was but a dim shadow in the soft, deep tones of the nearly faded twilight. She came close to him and he caught her in his arms; she held tightly to him as if she wanted to assure herself of his presence, safe and unharmed.

"Steve, yu got to go," she cried breathlessly. "Yu go to leave tonight before anything happens."

"Leave? I ain't goin' to, Jo."

"Yu better, Steve. They'll kill yu. I swear they will!"

Her face was close to his, her trembling hands were clutching his shoulders as though she might be about to shake him. Her wide, pleading eyes sought his in the gloom.

"They ain't goin' to do nothing."

"Yes, they are," she cried. "They've gone now to dynamite thet dippin' vat!"

"*What?*"

"Paw's just gone; they're meetin' —all of them, somewhere. They've got dynamite and they're going to blow up thet vat."

He tried to tear himself from her.

"Let me go, Jo," he said. "I've got to go"

"No, yu ain't goin' there, Steve! Yu ain't!"

"I got to," he returned brusquely.

"No, Steve. Yu got to leave but yu can't go to thet vat."

His lips were pressed into a tense grimness. His gleaming eyes were viciously narrowed.

"I have got to go there. I'll stop them! I'll stop them from that if I——"

"They've all got guns," the girl went on breathlessly, clutching him in desperation. "They'll kill yu, Steve. Ef yu go there they'll shoot yu."

"No. . . ."

"I'm afraid, Steve. I won't let yu go."

The girl's arms were about his neck and she had drawn herself to him, was clinging to him, her damp lips against his cheek.

"Please, Steve!"

The man claimed her lips and with savage passion pressed the warm, supple body of the girl closer to him. . . . The darkness was intimately and infinitely consuming.

STEVE PRINE ran, stumbling, panting, swearing. And long before he had reached the vicinity of the dipping vat he heard the detonation; the ground shook with the vibrant roar. When he came to the place there was only a lot of scattered debris.

Gale Anderson's store was empty except for the storekeeper himself when Prine entered it. The seats about the stove were singularly vacant; in a manner it was significant.

"Can I use your phone?"

"Sure."

Gale showed the young man the instrument and Steve called Chunchula. There he got in touch with the deputy sheriff and reported the case.

As he hung up the receiver and

turned, Gale read his intention in his face. He approached Prine with lanquid friendliness, his voice low and even, and kindly in tone.

"Yu better not bother with this," he said quietly. "There's a lot of feelin' roused up and naturally there's bound to be some temper. 'Spose'n yu let the sheriff's office do all the inquirin' into what happened tonight——"

The other regarded the storekeeper scornfully.

"I know who blew up that vat just as well as you do," Steve said acridly. "And I'm goin' to—to find them tonight!"

"You're a fool," Gale Anderson said.

Steve did not reply but started for the door. Gale stood before him, however.

"Better let me tell yu a few things before yu git any connipshun fits and get killed."

"I'm busy," was the terse answer.

Anderson still detained him by blocking his path.

"Maybe yu don't know the swamp," he said. "The swamp belongs to the moccasins and they're deadly. The folks here are like cottonmouths in a way—it's the effect of the environment, I reckin."

Steve Prine sniffed disdainfully.

"They're worse than snakes—miserable, stinking. . . ."

"Maybe," Anderson went on. "Maybe. But the swamp belongs to them. Yuh the one what's trespassin' in their environment, and it's natural they don't like it."

"Let me go," Steve cried impatiently.

"Yu better git out of this section," the storekeeper said. "I ain't sayin' about yu bein' right—but them moccasins hate intruders and they fights; they fight for each other—fer their mates and sech. And they kill. . . !"

"Let me go!"

Prine had brushed the other aside and was gone.

A few minutes after Steve had left Gale Anderson's store a girl entered. She was disheveled and dusty from her running. She dropped wearily to a chair in the store, gasping for breath. It was several seconds before she could speak to Gale.

The girl was Jo Thorpe; she had been following Prine since he had left her back there on the creek path, but she had been outdistanced. . . .

CHAPTER VI

THE MOCCASIN'S MATE

IT WAS to the young man who was plunging through the swamp night a remote, incongruous idea that Marcus Thorpe was the girl's father. Even if the thought formed in his confused, whirling brain, probably Steve Prine only vaguely comprehended that the man he was tracking down was a parent of the girl who had come to him to save him.

Doubtless it would have made very little difference had he considered that fact; Prine's mind was incensed with a kind of hatred, a virulent bitterness against this man—this quasi-moccasin who had threatened him with his fangs.

It was not strange to him, then, when he did not find the girl at the house when he got there.

There was a light in the kitchen and Prine strode upon the porch and hammered on the door with his fist. It was opened after a time, guardedly, a few inches.

A woman's voice inquired:

"What yu want?"

"I want to see Mr. Thorpe."

"He ain't here."

"Where is he, then?" Steve demanded.

"He's gone over to visit a neigh-

bor," came back the answer finally.

"What neighbor?"

"I don't know."

"When's he comin' back?"

"Reckin he'll be back 'fore long. What yu want to see him 'bout?"

This with some hesitation.

"Business," was the terse answer.

"Can't yu come back tomorrow?"

"No. I've got to see him tonight."

"What kind of business?"

"I'll wait until your husband comes home."

She peered intently at him for a time, her mind wavering in indecision. Finally she opened the door wider and allowed him to enter.

STEVE glanced quickly about the room. The woman apparently was home alone. Either Marcus Thorpe had not returned or had gone again, anticipating the visit of Prine.

"Sit down," the woman said.

Steve took a seat beside the table so that his back was against the wall and he faced the door and one window of the room. There was nothing to indicate that Mrs. Thorpe had been occupied.

"Yu want a cup of coffee?" she asked.

"I will take a cup, if you don't mind," he said.

The woman went to the crude cupboard across the room. It was half in shadows and as she stood with her back to the light Steve could not see what she was doing.

He heard the rattle of the chinaware; she seemed a long time procuring a cup, but Steve felt that her indolence was only an expression of her resentment for his being there. She fumbled for a moment longer and then went to the stove and filled a cup with the coffee.

"Thanks," Steve muttered.

He let the coffee cool some before attempting to drink it. The woman did not sit down; she stood partly back of the stove, not far from the door.

Only a little of the light played upon her there. Her face was a dim, inscrutable mask. Steve felt that her eyes were staring with bold curiosity, hate-filled and sinisterly cunning.

Prine took a swallow of the coffee, and coughed violently. He thought the woman chuckled. The coffee was bitter and seared his mouth and throat differently from the warmth of the liquid.

"What's the matter with this coffee?" he demanded.

"Ain't nuthin' the matter with it.

"You lie. What's in it?"

A SLOW, humorless smile spread over her face. Then abruptly her expression changed. Her eyes, which before had seemed snake-like in the beady, apparent lidlessness, now were narrowed.

"There's pisin in thet coffee," she said. "Moccasin pisin—the stuff thet comes out of the fang sacs."

"God. . . !"

Steve Prine leaped to his feet, his face convulsed. He swept the cup of coffee from the table and it shattered on the floor. He turned fiercely upon the woman: a small bore rifle was pointed at him.

"I know why yu come here," the woman was saying in a dry, toneless voice. "Yu come here t' git my husband. Yuh thet Steve Prine what's runnin' thet dippin' vat and threat ening to arrest folks ef they don't dip their cows. Yuh one of them no 'count Prines what's always tried to run things here'bouts."

Steve took a step toward the woman and his hand moved to his pocket for the revolver, but the rifle held menace.

"Yu come here tonight to git my Marcus? Tryin' t' arrest him er shoot him. Well, ain't no Prine go-

in' to take Marcus ef I can fight," she went on with maddening deliberateness.

The door had opened; the person there, taking in the scene, was unrevealed by the shadows. Mrs. Thorpe did not turn her head, keeping her eyes focused on Steve.

"Here's this Steve Prine come here a'ter yu, Marcus," she went on. "Reckin he aims to arrest yu or kill yu, but he didn't think women folks can fight."

She addressed her next words to the young man who stood beside the table, honestly quaking with terror, the cold perspiration rolling from his forehead.

"I'm goin' to kill yu," the woman said. "Ef thet moccasin pisin in thet coffee don't kill yu—reckin yu didn't swallow enough o' thet. So I'm goin' to shoot yu—yu won't come here no more botherin' decent folks 'bout the law and dippin' vats. . . ."

THE FIGURE in the doorway moved, leaping into the room.

"Don't yu do it, maw! *Steve!*"

But before the girl had wrenched the gun from her mother's hands a blue-yellow flame spurted from the muzzle, a sharp report resounded in the room; something hot grazed Steve's cheek . . . pain . . . and blood flowing onto his coat. . . .

Taken by surprise, Mrs. Thorpe had been unable to struggle for the possession of the weapon. In a flash Jo had jerked it from her fingers.

The woman whirled, facing her daughter, now with the rifle leveled at the mother.

"Yu better not have killed him," the girl screamed. "I'll kill yu ef yu did—he's mine. . . ."

Mrs. Thorpe had backed to the stove; her finger found the handle of the coffee pot, filled with boiling liquid. It was raised, the pot was poised and the muscles of the woman's arm tightened to hurl it, when the rifle spoke again.

The leap of fire from its mouth and the bullet that it spat plunged through her shoulder. The pot of coffee sank to the top of the stove and the arm went limp and her other hand grasped the shoulder. She reeled, staggered to a chair and slumped into it.

Jo stood as if dazed, and Steve, with a handkerchief pressed to the wound in his cheek, moved to her. He took the gun from her and threw it on the floor. She came to life then and turned anxiously to him.

"Yu better go, Steve. Yu got to git out of this."

"You, too."

"No, I'm all right. Yu got to git away."

"I won't go without you, Jo. I love you—I—I do—you'll go?"

With her arm about him they went out into the night. . . .

THE WOMAN was unconscious of their leaving. The pain in her shoulder was great and she felt weak; the room swayed sickeningly about her. The coffee pot hummed as it boiled on the stove.

Getting laboriously to her feet the woman moved with unsteady steps to the cupboard, got one of the thick china cups and brought it back to the stove. She poured it full of the strong, black coffee and then sat down in the chair again.

The cup of coffee in her fingers brought something to her mind.

"Pisin. . . . Them Prine's always wuz cowards. Him gittin' scared over a little shinney likker in his coffee; made him believe it was moccasin pisin. . . ."

She drank the cup of coffee and set the empty cup on the table. She was very weak . . . the room was whirling . . . her body sagged and slid to the floor. . . .

Little Box, Big Box, Bandbox--

By HELEN ORMSBEE

IT SEEMED to Kate Farnam that a little while ago she had been lying in a room with bare walls, where everything was excessively sanitary and lacking in charm. If only she hadn't felt so weak and confused, she would have told the people around her that they didn't understand how to furnish a place attractively. That dreadful golden oak dresser, for instance! They had no taste, those people.

She didn't like them, anyway. They were so brisk and professional when they took her temperature and wrote on those charts of theirs. But they hadn't deceived her.

Once, for a moment, the whirling in her head had stopped and she had heard them talking about her. She was very ill. That much she had gathered without their suspecting it.

Or had she really been in that room at all? She was not certain. However, it didn't matter.

Now, at least, she had escaped from it.

SHE WAS walking toward what appeared to be a large apartment house, built in the Georgian style.

Well kept, she decided, eyeing the gleaming plate-glass windows and trim window boxes with approval. Not a bad place to live in, if the rooms were large enough.

The street door was opened to her by a boy in the neatest of uniforms.

"I want to see the superintendent," she told him, and knew instantly that that was why she had come.

"It's about renting an apartment."

"Yes, madam. Right this way, please. We've been expecting you."

It struck Kate as a trifle uncanny that any hall-boy should be so very alert and tidy.

"It'd be heaven, living here, if all the others are like him," she thought. "But what did he mean

hen he said they were expecting
le?"

He conducted her across a spacious
obby to a door marked, "Mr.
Mimms, Superintendent."

"If you'll step in, madam, he's
here."

Kate turned the knob and, walk-
ng in, found herself in an office.
From the desk in the corner, the
superintendent rose. He had kind
eyes, no longer young, and a closely
clipped gray mustache. His face was
oddly, illusively familiar.

"I'm looking for an apartment,"
she began quickly. "For my husband
and myself. Six rooms and two
baths might do. I'm Mrs. Farnam.
Mrs. Alexander Farnam, of Ridge-
field Hills."

The superintendent nodded grave-
ly and motioned her to a chair be-
side his desk.

"Won't you sit down? We have
several suites that I can show you,
but first there are a few details."

He seated himself, reached over,
and took her pulse.

She gazed at him, puzzled.

"That's a funny thing for you to
be doing. And you don't look like a
janitor. I mean, a superintendent. I
noticed that the minute I came in.

"Now I see! You're Doctor Paige.
You have his eyes, and—— I've
known you all my life. But why are
you here, pretending to be somebody
else?

"And why am I here? How did I
come? It seemed perfectly simple,
but now I'm not sure. Everything's
getting mixed up again. Oh, don't
let it! Don't let it."

"Steady, steady," he urged in a
level voice that gave her confidence.

He smiled, and the flesh under his
eyes puckered as though it were on
gathering strings. That was like
Doctor Paige.

"I'm Mr. Mimms. Don't forget
that. *Mr. Mimms.* You may have
noticed some resemblance, but lots of
people look like other people. As for
my not being your idea of a super-
intendent, why, this is a very large
apartment house, several thousand
suites. A man of intelligence is need-
ed for my position."

"And now," he added easily,
"what about this apartment you
want? For your husband and your-
self, you say?"

"Yes. He's not here yet. I've
come on in advance to pick it out."

"H'm! Any children?"

Kate shook her head.

"Or pets?"

"We kept a cat once, but she
clawed the furniture and I couldn't
stand that. You see, I have some
exceedingly good antiques. Early
nineteenth century American. Most
of them are heirlooms, but I've
picked up a few besides to fill in. It's
my hobby. My husband says I don't
own those things; they own me."

SHE SIGHED. "He and I don't
agree on some points. When people
have been married ten years, I sup-
pose it's always like that. But Andy!
Mr. Farnham, that is. Why, he
wanted to sub-let our house and take
me off on a business trip of his to
Europe! *Sub-let,* mind you, and have
Tom, Dick, and Harry putting their
feet on great-grandmother Strong's
sofa, or laying hot cigarette stubs
on the Elliott sideboard. You know
what tenants are——"

She broke off.

"I shouldn't be talking to a
stranger about all this, Mr. Mimms.
But I've been sick, and it's left me a
tiny bit lightheaded and childish. I
could cry because I've come here all
alone and don't know quite what to
do. I'm not going to cry, though.
You'll see. Practical and sensible.
That's what I am!"

"Good. Glad to hear it."

"It must be because of your

looking like Doctor Paige that I can't help telling you," she went on. "I feel acquainted with you, somehow. Andy's been on my mind dreadfully, there's the truth. It seemed as if he and I hated each other, that afternoon when he sprang the plan about Europe on me. Of course I wouldn't consent to it. I *couldn't*. But I'll never forget the things he said——"

Kate checked herself. Even now, she was trembling with the same sense of being misjudged which she had felt that day. Andy hadn't been fair to her.

She stood up.

"Can't we go and look at those apartments Mr.—Mr. Mimms? I'm in a hurry to settle, if I can find something that suits me. I've never had an absolutely free choice until now."

She was seized with anxiety to make sure of that choice before Andy could arrive and upset it in any way. He didn't understand.

"You care more for this precious old junk of yours than you do for me," he had told her often enough. "That's what it comes to."

He had been wrong, cruelly, intentionally. He had said it to hurt her. If she did cherish what he termed her old junk, it was in order to make him the right kind of home. If she could only once show him! Why, this was her opportunity. She would select the rooms, arrange everything, and when he saw the results, he would be convinced.

Mr. Mimms led her out through the lobby to an elevator which bore the sign, "Express to the 51st floor."

They entered the car, but as soon as it began to ascend, Kate crouched in the corner terrified.

"Can't you stop it?" she begged. "It starts my head and feet floating apart, the way they did back there in that room I came from. Or did I dream all that? I don't *want* them to float apart. It worries me so. Stop the elevator, Mr. Mimms. You wouldn't like it if *your* head and feet——"

"I'd try to take it philosophically," returned her companion unimpressed. "However, here we are at the fifty-first floor. Step right out. You feel quite as usual, don't you?"

"Y-yes." Kate cheered up at once. "And now, let's see the apartments."

"A little way down the corridor, please. Here, on the left, is the first suite."

He unlocked a door for her, and she passed into a sunny room with many windows.

"The living-room," Mr. Mimms explained. "Eighteen by twenty-four. Windows on three sides. Hot water heat. Open fireplace. Plenty of electric outlets. Decorations to suit the tenant."

"It's attractive," murmured Kate, in the non-committal tone of a seasoned house hunter. There were always defects to be discovered later.

SHE strolled across to one of the windows and looked out. Far below her stretched broad, straight streets, but there was not a familiar landmark anywhere. It was not like any city she had ever seen. She felt suddenly homesick, alarmed.

How had she come here? The sunshine in which she was standing had no warmth, and when she laid her hand on the wall near her it was as if she were touching clouds.

She shivered and turned to face Mr. Mimms.

"What place is this?" she demanded, trying to keep her voice steady. "Everything's so—so queer here, and I'm frightened. You must tell me!"

He smiled at her.

"Nothing to be excited about. This is heaven."

"Heaven? It—it doesn't seem——

ll these apartments?" She caught er breath. "Oh, are these the many mansions?"

She shivered once more.

"But I didn't want to come! I iked life in Ridgefield Hills, except when Andy and I disagreed, and everything was tangled up. I am—I mean, I *was*—only thirty-two. Isn't hat too young to die? I must be lead if I'm here."

"You are, but don't be concerned about it. It's nothing."

"How—how did it happen to me?"

For a moment he did not answer.

"If you'll follow my advice, Mrs. Farnam, you won't ask that question at present. Sometimes people who've just arrived find the subject distressing. That's why it's generally arranged that they don't recall it at first. Of course we keep records on file for reference. Later you might consult them."

"Pooh! I'm not a child, and I insist on being told! If I'm in heaven, I'll have to make the best of it, I suppose."

All the while she was speaking, an inner voice taunted her: "Whistling to keep your courage up! You don't feel as cool and collected as that. Whistling to keep—why, you're in a strange, far-away place where——"

Mr. Mimms began soothingly:

"Very well, since you want to know. There was a fire in your house, I understand. It was at night and you were asleep. People roused you, though, and got you out. But you ran in again to——"

"I remember now. It was to get great-grandmother's portrait out of the library. I thought it'd take only a minute to climb up and lift it down. That's all I know. Why couldn't I?"

"Overcome by smoke when they found you," replied Mr. Mimms succinctly.

"There were contusions, too, and a severe second degree burn on the left forearm. They worked like dogs on you, those people at the hospital."

She brushed all this aside. A dreadful suspicion crowded in upon her.

"The fire! It must have ruined my beautiful old pieces." Her heart sank.

"Oh, now I see! That's why you told me not to ask you. You didn't want me to realize I'd lost them. Great-grandmother's sofa, and the bird's-eye maple bureau, and the turn-top Empire table with brass feet, and the portraits, and the Elliott sideboard, and the purple luster tea set and ever so much more. They all went, I suppose——"

She turned away to hide tears which she could not keep back, even though she had said she wasn't going to cry.

"It *would* have been better for me not to know. I—I'm not behaving well, but I'm tired and confused, and I've come such a long way. I meant to be sensible."

She was sobbing.

"My dear Mrs. Farnam, it's not as bad as you think."

SHE shook her head, without looking at him. "It's no use to tell me that. What do you know about antiques, anyway? I'll never find another lowboy like the one that's gone. It was the only piece of Chippendale I had.

"And the Phyfe chairs! I loved them. I used to put my hands on them sometimes and remember, 'Beauty is truth, and truth is beauty.'

"That's so, even in furniture, isn't it? I've lost them just because Andy didn't make that good-for-nothing furnace man of ours stop dropping matches around the cellar."

"Listen to me, Mrs Farnham—"

"I don't want to listen to you! You're strange, and so is this place. It makes me shudder. I'm alone. If Andy were only here it wouldn't be quite so bad. Why isn't he? That's another thing I don't understand, and I'm afraid!"

This sudden, unexplainable fear had grown by geometric progression.

Cowering, she clenched her hands against her temples and cried out: "Andy! Why don't you——?"

Her husband's voice reached her faintly.

"It's all right, dearest. Don't worry."

Kate whirled around, her heart beating wildly.

"He's come, Mr. Mimms. He's come!"

Ah, Andy had not called her "dearest" for a long time. In a moment he would be here, and they would both forget the bitter things they had said. Perhaps it was only in heaven that misunderstanding could be wholly cleared away. Back on earth there were so many barriers, but she and Andy had got beyond them now.

Swiftly, all anxiety slipped from her.

She ran to the door, pulled it open, and stood gazing down the corridor. It was empty.

"Oh, dear, that's disappointing, isn't it? I was sure he'd be coming along the hall. He said not to worry, though. Perhaps he's looking for me, and isn't certain where to find me."

"In that case, he'd have gone to the information desk on the main floor to inquire," suggested Mr. Mimms. Then, in a matter-of-fact tone:

"If I were you I'd look over the apartment while you're waiting. And better close that door. You're standing in a draft."

"That's silly. There can't be draf in heaven."

"Not after you're acclimated, course."

She shut the door.

"Your furniture's been ship through to you," announced Mimms. "That's what I was tryi to tell you, but you wouldn't liste Our receiving department has no fied me that it's here."

"Then—then it wasn't hurt in t fire? I'm so glad. With my thing and Andy, I can settle down and comfortable here after all."

She was feeling more like h everyday self.

"Look here, Mr. Mimms, I'd ju like you to explain something. this is heaven, what are my hei looms doing here? They're *things* you know, and when you die yo can't take 'em with you. I've hear people say so."

"They are misinformed." Mr Mimms chuckled. "When we come here we bring a lot of stuff along. The things we've really cared for back there, are checked through. You have two loads of chairs, tables, chests, and goodness knows what."

"But how can I? They're left behind for some cousins of mine to inherit. The worst of it is they won't appreciate them."

She sighed.

"Shucks! What you bring is your *idea* of all that furniture. Everything here's an idea, this building, and the streets outside, and the golf course on the edge of the town."

"I can't see——"

"Not at first, Mrs. Farnam, but it's very simple. Ever heard of the old theory, that before a thing exists there's the thought of it?"

A shadowy recollection of something she had read flitted through Kate's mind.

"On earth, my dear madam, the thought has to be worked out in

something tangible. With us, it's sufficient by itself. Merely a short-cut."

"It—it's not a bit plain to me." Again she was beginning to be vaguely troubled.

"It feels as if the bottom had dropped out of everything."

"Tut! Tut! You said you'd make the best of being here. Let's get down to brass tacks. How about signing a lease for this apartment?"

"Good, that's the way to talk to me! It braces me up."

She surveyed the room critically.

"H'm! With so many doors and windows, there's not much wall space. That's a drawback, isn't it? I don't see any place for great-grandmother Strong's sofa. There's the wall on the right of the fireplace, but I doubt if it's long enough. It's a large piece, six feet and ten inches."

"Why not measure and be sure? Here, take my tape-line."

"Thank you. That's a good suggestion."

She unreeled the pocket tape measure and went over to the wall beside the fireplace.

"Let's see. One yard. Two yards, and—and two inches. There! Too short. There's not another spot in the room, e i t h e r. Sorry, Mr. Mimms."

"Couldn't you put the sofa in front of the fire?"

Kate stiffened.

"I've studied interior decorating, and——"

"Pardon me. I merely thought that——"

"I didn't mean to offend you, Mr. Mimms! You're the only friend I have around here."

She would have liked to cry over this, but stifled the impulse.

"You see, the effect would be spoiled if——"

"Oh!"

"So this apartment's out of the question. I'll wait here till my husband comes and then we'll look at the next one on your list."

SHE had lost her desire to decide everything without consulting Andy. How childish it had been of her! And how pathetically small that long succession of clashes between them seemed to her now. Yet they had once grown to fill more and more of her consciousness, and Andy's, too, until the moment had come when he and she had faced each other, openly hostile.

They had fought from ambush long before that, thrusting at one another under cover of pleasantry.

She saw it all, now, in a sort of perspective. Odd, though, that the past should be so clear to her, while her sense of these celestial mansions remained a trifle jumbled, incomplete. There must be a reason.

Oh, well, there wasn't time to think it out. She had to go on remembering. Something made her.

"Andy *loathes* antiques," she used to laugh when callers were present of an evening back in Ridgefield Hills.

"Why, he'll come home from the office and drop down in that chair, just as if it weren't ninety years old! I can hear it creak and snap under him. Some day he'll break it."

Her husband would grin at her. "If I do crash, you'll rush into the room and ask, 'Is the chair hurt, darling?' "

Then the friends who had stopped in for an agreeable chat would pretend to enjoy the gibe.

Thus, little by little, she and Andy had drawn apart. There had been a scene when she showed him the scratches which his can of tobacco had made on her turn-top mahogany table. It had ended with his carrying the tobacco upstairs to his own

room. After that, he had smoked there in the evenings, while she, hurt and angry in the living-room below, made a lamentable failure of reading the paper.

She had not meant to drive Andy out of the living-room, and he knew it. Why should he put the most hateful interpretation on whatever she said? One night she had gone up and asked if she might sit and sew beside his reading lamp. He had nodded and offered her a chair.

This marked a truce between them. Neither of them mentioned the scratches on the table downstairs, though she knew that both of them remembered.

They had reached a tacit understanding that their differences went too deep to be discussed. To avoid controversial points, they talked of nothing which genuinely interested either of them, and on this basis they had gradually contrived the outward semblance of companionship.

Then, one afternoon, Andy had come home in high spirits to pack a suitcase for a two days' business trip to Boston.

"Great news, Kate!"

He was tossing collars and socks into the traveling bag.

"How'd you like to go to Europe with me for six months? The firm's going to send me, and——"

"Europe?"

She advanced doubts as to the advisability of closing their house in cold weather. Wouldn't the floors warp, or the water pipes freeze? And then there was the veneer on those Empire pieces! Extremes in temperature were fatal to veneer.

She grew emphatic. No, it was simply out of the question to shut up the house.

"Oh, if you'd rather have it lived in," ventured Andy, "we can probably rent it furnished. It's a pretty desirable location. I'll see some good agents."

"Andy! Are you *crazy?* Do you think I'd allow strangers to come in here? Why, they might wreck the place."

"Let 'em! Great hat, take a chance! Haven't we two been wrecking everything between us lately, everything *except* your confounded furniture?"

She stood aghast. All this was what they had managed not to speak of in the past months.

"That's always your attitude toward my things, Andy! If they'd been handed down in your family, it'd be different, I suppose."

Every smoldering resentment in her was aflame.

"But your people——"

"Say it! My grandfather and grandmother didn't have much. Gosh! I wouldn't be the snob you are, Kate!"

"Andy!"

He flushed. "I didn't mean to let that slip out. Forget it, will you? Here's what I wanted to say. All the way home I was thinking it over. Will you listen?"

Still smarting, she inclined her head slightly.

"Well, you know how things have been. Each of us with a sort of grievance that we were afraid to mention. You consider me a thick-skinned lowbrow, lacking in appreciation for the finer things of life. Good Lord, I could appreciate 'em maybe if I hadn't watched you tying yourself hand and foot to your damn possessions."

"Thanks! So that's your view of *me.* Well?"

"Let's cut loose from it all, Kate, get away for a while. We'll see new things and—and build up a new set of interests. While we're doing it, the old sore spots 'll have time to heal. There! I've put it to you straight. When they spoke to me

about going to Europe, I had a hunch that this was our chance. Will you take it?"

"If I'd had more notice, so there'd be time to arrange matters. But I can't see how——"

He gave a short laugh. "You're like the old woman from the country who went on a railroad journey.

"She'd always wanted to take it. But she never looked out the window, she was so busy hunting over her packages and counting up, 'Little box, big box, bandbox and bundle.'

"If you don't watch out, Kate, that's how you'll go through life."

She was not amused.

"And how would you *advise* me to go through it?"

"I'd say, travel light, and live as you go."

He paused.

"Kate, can't you and I put up a fight to save ourselves? If we don't we're going to smash. Oh, not this week or next, but that's where we're headed. Let's chuck all the things behind us that have rubbed us wrong, and——"

"You mean *the things I like!* No! Why should I leave them here to go to rack and ruin when *you* won't give up being critical and unfair to me? You'd be the same on either side of the ocean. You misjudge me, Andy."

He gazed at her.

"It's all this I thought we could cut loose from. But, Lord, you don't care enough to make the fight!"

He snapped the locks on his suitcase, seized it and flung himself out of the room. She heard the front door close behind him.

THE WHOLE scene came back to her in a flash as she stood speaking to Mr. Mimms.

Travel light, Andy had said. Perhaps he was right. Yet here she was arriving in heaven with two loads of furniture. She wondered what he would think of it when he came.

"Mrs. Farnam," Mr. Mimms broke in upon her thoughts, "I believe you'd better not wait for your husband before you see those other apartments. He may be—er—delayed."

Kate felt a quick, unreasoning mistrust. Had something happened to Andy? How silly to imagine it! In heaven things couldn't "happen," that is, accidents couldn't befall people. She must control this ridiculous fear.

"What can be delaying him?" she asked Mr. Mimms quite coolly.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, details to be arranged. Registration cards and all that. Endorsements from two reputable residents."

This sounded reassuring.

"And now, about those suites," the superintendent went on. "Come, let's hustle along. We have other tenants arriving and they might snap up the very place you'd want."

After that it seemed to her that she followed Mr. Mimms through a wearisome succession of hallways which lengthened as she walked down them.

"Can't we ever get to the end of one of them?" she panted. "I'm terribly tired."

They halted now and then to inspect an apartment, Mr. Mimms insisting that she measure each room to see if her furniture would fit. It never did.

"There's always a piece left over that won't go anywhere," groaned Kate at last.

"This time it's the lowboy. I'll give it away, throw it away! Anything to get rid of it. I'll take this place and send for Andy. No matter if it isn't just what I wanted."

Mr. Mimms objected.

"But you brought the lowboy with

you. You can't throw it away. That's one of the rules here."

She felt her lips quiver.

"You're punishing me. Punishing me for bringing all these things. But it's cruel of you when I'm so tired. And I've been ill, I tell you. Why don't you help me? Have I got to keep on *forever* measuring rooms where my things won't fit?"

She was trembling and uttering stifled moans, which sounded weak and strange to her. She would have liked to stop them, but she couldn't.

"Quiet, quiet," urged Mr. Mimms' voice close to her.

The touch of something cold upon her arm, high up near the shoulder. Then a little stab.

"Why, that's a hypodermic needle. What are you doing with a thing like that in heaven?"

"There! It's all right. Don't bother about it," was the only response he made her.

Dimly she realized that this was not an answer to her question, but she didn't care. She felt more comfortable now, and she was beginning to float off in a rather pleasant haze.

Suddenly, though, Mr. Mimms seemed to be blowing a police whistle. Was it that, or just the ringing in her ears? Oh, but it must be a whistle, for two policemen came rushing forward as though they had sprung out from the walls of the corridor where she and Mr. Mimms were standing.

"Arrest this woman, officers," he ordered, drawing himself up.

"Arrest her!"

She quailed.

"But what have I done?"

"Yes. What *has* she done?" inquired one of the two policemen.

THERE was a peculiarity about those men. At first glance she had thought they were dressed in blue uniforms with brass buttons. Yet now she studied them furtively as they stationed themselves on either side of her, and she saw that they had on white coats and trousers, like hospital attendents.

"What's the complaint against her?" asked the officer on her left.

"Disturbing the peace?" demanded the one on her right.

Mr. Mimms appeared to take the whole proceeding as a matter of course.

"She's broken our rules. Wanted to throw away the lowboy. Lock her up. Her case 'll go on the calendar for next Monday."

Kate nerved herself to protest.

"You can't put me in prison before I'm tried. There's some law about that, only I don't remember it exactly."

"Bail! You haven't given bail," proclaimed the policeman on her left. "That's why we're doing it. Habeas corpus. See?"

"Mr. Mimms, I—I haven't any money with me. But my husband will furnish the bail. Andy, you know. Can't you—won't you find him?"

She caught herself wringing her hands.

"No use, Mrs. Farnam. He's not —er—on the premises at present."

"What do you mean by that? He *was* here only a little while ago. Oh, you're putting me off, evading."

Mr. Mimms softened.

"My dear Mrs. Farnam, don't worry. He may have gone out to get signatures on his endorsement cards, or—— Well, all you need to do is to be quiet and relax. This prison business isn't as bad as you anticipate. I'll come along with you and see you nicely settled, if you want."

"Thank you. If—if I *must* go——"

The two officers picked her up and put her on a stretcher. They carried her an endless distance down the

hall and around corner after corner. It took ever so long.

At last the policemen bore her through a doorway.

"All right, ma'am. Here you are." They lifted her off the stretcher, stood her upright on her feet, and departed, leaving her in Mr. Mimms' charge.

She glanced doubtfully around the room to which she had been brought. Then she began to laugh. Oh, this was a relief.

"Why, it's not a prison at all, Mr. Mimms. It's—it's the *very apartment I wanted!* I can feel it's the right one. But how——?" She was breathless.

"How did my furniture come here? I can't understand."

Strange! The room was filled with her own belongings, her things which had been checked through! It was weird, this living where everything was an idea.

She would have liked to be unconcerned about it, but her heart gave a flutter of alarm.

"I won't get excited, Mr. Mimms. I won't! I'm going to keep a firm hand on myself. Let me tell you, though, what seems queer to me.

"This," and she looked around her, "is the living-room I've always dreamed of; exactly as I planned it, even down to the rug before the fireplace, and this armchair pushed in front of the blaze for Andy! That's great-grandmother's sofa under those casement windows. And there beside Andy's chair is the table he scratched once with his tobacco can."

She drew a breath of satisfaction.

"I must see the other rooms. Wait a minute. I'll be right back."

She hurried through the dining-room, kitchen and bedroom, returning elated.

"The whole place is a success, Mr. Mimms. I never had a home just as I wanted it before. How *could* you call this a prison?"

"H'm! Well, prison is a relative term," was his reply. "You'll be sentenced to stay here."

"But, with my husband, I won't mind. We'll be very happy together. Happier than we were——"

SHE could even be glad now that Andy and she had reached heaven. Back in Ridgefield Hills they might have gone on acting at cross purposes, wounding each other, but here——

Already she had learned to see him with clearer eyes, her big, careless Andy, who had begged that they put up a fight to save themselves. To save their love was what he had meant, only he would have called it sentimental slop to talk that way.

Mr. Mimms coughed uneasily.

"You'll have to know the worst, Mrs. Farnam. Your husband isn't coming."

Kate laid her hand on the armchair which was waiting for Andy. She felt a little dizzy.

"You're keeping him from me! Is that what putting me in jail means? Or has something dreadful happened to him? Oh, now I *am* frightened."

She was shaking. All her terror of this heaven came upon her afresh. She recalled how she had looked down the hall for Andy and had not seen him. That had been uncanny.

"I heard him call me, Mr. Mimms. You remember that, don't you? He was here then, and yet you say——"

Her companion shook his head slowly. "You imagined he was calling you. I let you think so to quiet you at the time.

"But now that you've settled down to stay you'll have to know the truth. It's this. Your husband isn't coming here *because he didn't die.*

You're the only one who lost your life in the fire."

"I don't believe you! My husband isn't the kind of man who'd stand by, safe, and let his wife be killed. There's some mistake."

"Unfortunately, no! I've had the records searched. It seems he'd gone to Boston on a business trip. He was away the night the fire broke out in your house."

Kate felt her knees weaken. She leaned heavily against Andy's chair.

"That's so. I'd forgotten. He did go to Boston."

For a moment the room swam before her, the very room which had given her such content.

"Then it's true. He's—not coming."

The fact was inescapable. Was she to wait years and years, perhaps, with nothing to fill the emptiness in her heart? She would not be able to endure it.

"How can I stay here, Mr. Mimms, without Andy? You don't know. There were ever so many things I wanted to tell him.

Let me go back to Ridgefield Hills. *Please!* I'm sure you could if you'd use your influence. Other tenant's 'll be glad to snap up this apartment. They can have it. Only let me——"

"My dear madam, *where do you think you are?* People don't slip out of heaven as easily as that."

"You mean they *have* to stay?"

She grew defiant.

"Then you needn't tell me they're happy here, lonely, as I am!"

"But they're not all lonely. The happy ones manage to bring a little love along in their consignments of goods. It packs and ships as well as anything else. Better, in fact."

She was reckless.

"If I'm to suffer because I—I forgot it, will you tell me what's the difference between heaven and hell?"

"My dear Mrs. Farnam, they're the same place."

He smiled derisively at her. Somehow, he was changed from the Mr. Mimms with kind eyes.

"The difference depends on what you bring."

A throbbing, overmastering rage against him filled her. She pulsed with it from head to foot.

"I hate you! Hate you, Mr. Mimms, do you hear? You let me think you were my friend. You're a cheat. That's it, a cheat! There's some mistake about this heaven of yours. You sha'n't keep me. I won't stay! I don't want this apartment, or any of these things!"

She made a savage effort, and pushed away the chair against which she had been leaning. It overturned.

Beside her stood the table Andy's tobacco can had scratched. The marks were still there. Softly, she ran her fingers over them, the only touch of him she had in all this well-ordered, comfortable, desolate place. A lump came into her throat. She threw herself across the table, beating her hands upon it.

"Andy! Andy! I've got to find you," she cried. "Help me, won't you? They sha'n't keep me here!"

A thought came to her. The door! That was the way out. If only she could pull herself up from here and get across the room, but her arms and legs had grown so heavy. It would take tremendous exertion. Still, she must try. Everything depended on it.

Slowly, panting as she did so, she forced herself to stand up. There was the door! Could she reach it before Mr. Mimms would realize what she was doing and stop her? For the moment, he wasn't watching. How stupid of him! If he should turn, though, and see her!

Oh, why *couldn't* she be quick?

At every step her feet seemed weighted to the floor, and yet, stealthily, laboriously, she was creeping closer. Almost, almost! At last she had her hand upon the door-knob, and that ghastly heaviness oozed away from her. Why, she could move like lightning now. She had won!

"Good-by, Mr. Mimms," she shouted in triumph, and turned the knob.

"No use. The door's locked," he informed her calmly. "I knew you'd try to work that dodge."

Clutching the knob, she shook the door upon its hinges.

She tugged and pulled, but it did not give way.

"I'll splinter it! I'll crash through somehow. You sha'n't stop me. I've got strength, I tell you! If it will only last——"

She wondered if it would. She must hurry.

Near her stood the Phyfe chair which she prized most. She seized it by the back and, raising it as high as her head, rushed swiftly with it against the door.

The chair crashed at the impact and fell from her hands. There was no time to think of that, though. Looking up, she saw that one of the door-hinges was wrenched partly out of place.

"It's started!"

She was sobbing, stifling, in the struggle.

"I must keep on."

She put her back to the door and pushed with all her might, breathing heavily.

Once again she felt a tiny stab on her arm.

All the furniture began to whirl around her. Great-grandmother Strong's sofa, the lowboy, the Empire table, the broken chair. She shut her eyes, so that she would not see. . . .

WHEN she opened them, she was back in that room with the bare, cream-colored walls. Yes, there stood the golden oak dresser.

Someone was bending over her.

She put out her hand. "Andy——"

He took it.

"Andy, they told me you weren't coming."

"I came as fast as I could get here, dear."

He smiled.

"Everything's all right, and you're better. We'll soon have you sitting up eating square meals. But you need to rest now. Don't worry. Go to sleep."

She clung to his hand.

"Please, Andy. There's something I must tell you. I'm sorry I scolded about the scratches on the table. You remember? And I'll go anywhere with you, even Europe. There, I've said it. Oh, don't let them take me away from you, will you? Hold on to me, Andy. We'll put up a fight together."

"Of course we will. We'll come out on top. You'll see."

His big fingers pressed closer into her palm. It was so good to feel them.

"And now, you ought to be going to sleep, dear. You mustn't get too tired."

"But there's such a lot I'd like to ask you. One question, anyhow. My things, the furniture, and so on. Were they lost in the fire?"

Watching, she saw him glance away. "We'll talk about that later. After you've had a rest."

"They're gone. I know it. I can tell. Oh, Andy, I'm almost glad. Travel light, you said. I'll try——"

The God of Summer

The Legend of
The Cover Design

THE roll of thunder, the flash of lightning—and then the rain. The time of drought is over. The dragon gods have risen from the pools and gone forth to battle.

Into the land of the Chinese comes the season of plenty.

China—the very name brings a feeling of mystery. . . .

Everywhere dwelt the dragon, in olden days—in every form; on land, on sea and in the heavens. Even the pine tree, as it grew old, became scaly, the branches more gnarled and claw-like until, after hundreds of years it, too, turned into a dragon—a dragon of life and rain.

Dragons of every color, yellow, red, green and blue; one for each season.

On the cover we have the red dragon, the God of Summer, the giver of rain and the crops. When he was pleased, the land gave abundantly. But when he was made angry, the crops failed.

A queer fate hovered over the Chinese emperors. They were ordained by the gods and were the only mortals who had any direct influence with them.

A wise and just emperor was a joy to the dragon gods and the people prospered. But when the emperor was unworthy, the dragons became exceedingly wroth.

During the time of drought the dragons were wont to sleep in the pools. When they awoke they would leave the pools and go forth to seek battle with each other.

As they fought, flaming sparks would flash through the sky, the sound of the conflict would rumble overhead and it would rain.

Good-natured dragons would soon stop fighting and the rains would cease. And the storm would be a blessing.

Angry dragons, however, would fight for days until the floods would come and lay waste the lands.

Whereupon the peasants would rise up and kill the emperor.

FRED. T. EVERETT.

Dead Men Make No Music

By EDWINA LEVIN MACDONALD

A FIVE-PART STORY—PART THREE

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

Odollee Meynard, *protected by convent walls for fifteen years, receives a summons on her eighteenth birthday to meet her father, whom she has not seen since she was three years old, at the home of the Meynards in the islands of the Mississippi Delta. She is accompanied by a school friend*—Jackie Tarver.

On their arrival the girls ask Joe Tobias, *gardener, as to the whereabouts of* Pierre *Meynard, Odollee's father, and they are told that he has been dead for thirty years.*

Odollee is accused of being an impostor by Henri Meynard—Pierre's twin brother—who has overheard the conversation with the gardener. Odollee *shows him a strange ring which she has with her and which she has been told will prove her identity should she be questioned. Henri, at the sight of the ring, has a nervous attack.*

Later Odollee *and* Jackie *meet* John Meynard—*called by the girls the Eagle—and his twin brother, Louis—who looks like a hawk—in conference. Doctor Blackman and Judge MacCauley, who came down with John on the same boat with the girls, and who have been retained to look into the occult happenings which have occurred in the house and which have caused the illness of the father of the twins, are also there.*

Sanchez, *an old serving woman, calls* Odollee *away as she is about to produce her papers and the girl stays so long that* Jackie *goes to look for her and hears a man's voice in the suite. When the door is opened* Odollee *is alone and smiling, but there are traces of tears on her face.*

During dinner there is ghostly music which fills the house. It is this phenomenon which has caused the boys' father to become a nervous wreck. The Doctor thinks the music is played by the spirit of Pierre Meynard, *who is seeking revenge for a wrong done by his brother, but the* Judge *will not agree—"for dead men make no music."*

CHAPTER XVI

WHOSE HANDWRITING?

THE CUCKOO popped out to cry nine. And the question of Odollee's claim, interrupted by that weird and glorious music, was resumed.

"I suppose you are aware of the fact, Miss Meynard," said Louis, "that while your being in possession of this ring is strange, it proves nothing as regards your claim to the protection of this house; that unless you can produce further evidence——"

John made a gesture of protest, and seemed about to speak, but the Judge interrupted him.

"This is not the time, John, for politeness and evasions. This business of an entailed estate is all very well if men are fools enough to accept it; but it won't hold a minute in the Louisiana courts.

"And if this young lady can prove that she is the daughter of Pierre Meynard, she can by law establish her right to her father's share of the estate, which would be exactly one-half of all lands, moneys and stock; even a half interest in this house and its furnishings.

"So to my mind the most important question at issue just now is not the matter which brought us here, but the grounds upon which this young lady proposes to base her claim. What have you, Miss Meynard, beside the ring?"

"Very little. But I think my uncle will acknowledge me," said Odollee in a low voice. "Of course the matter must be taken up with him. An explanation of my presence was due his sons and I have given it. But, after all, they can do little."

The Judge gave her a shrewd glance. "Just so; just so. At the same time Mr. Meynard, Sr., being in very bad health, his sons naturally want to spare him any unpleasantness unless they're absolutely convinced that he must be consulted. Therefore if you can help——"

"Here are the letters I mentioned," she said. "The duplicate letters which, together with the ring, were to safeguard me from being called for by some one who might have been inclined to do me harm. Perhaps you would like to see them."

She gave them to John. "There is one also addressed to your father. It was written by my father—while dying—to be delivered by me."

JOHN opened one casually; then swiftly opened the other without having read the first. He held them side by side, astonishment on his face.

Glancing at Odollee, he returned to the letters, studying first one, then the other. Finally he looked around at all of us with a dazed expression.

Louis took the letters from his brother's relaxed hand, uttered a sharp exclamation, then laughed sardonically. He passed the letters to the Judge, who handed them back.

"Don't read French."

Louis translated the first letter. "The second, dated fifteen years later, is an exact duplicate," he said.

The letters added nothing to what Odollee had already told them and me. The second letter contained a postscript suggesting that the authenticity of the handwriting, if questioned, be tested by comparison with Pierre's diary, adding in conclusion, "I believe my handwriting has undergone very little change. Henri will need no verification."

"Did your uncle keep a diary?" asked the Judge.

"Yes."

"Let's have a look at it."

"Judge, I know——" began John.

Louis broke in angrily: "I don't think it necessary to make public Uncle Pierre's private affairs merely to prove that he didn't write those letters."

"Anything, everything may be necessary," said the Judge. "Though naturally," he added to Odollee, "these letters would be absurd to offer in court, Miss Meynard, if it can absolutely be proven that Pierre Meynard has been dead thirty years. You must see that."

"Yes, I see that," said Odollee quietly. "But I have no intention at present of taking the matter into court. The Meynards settle their affairs among themselves."

Louis' face cleared. "Just so."

JOHN went to the book shelves and returned with a small set of black day-books. He laid four on a table, retaining the fifth.

"This is the last one." He opened it and glanced through it with growing surprise, then handed it to the Judge, who gave himself absorbedly to comparing the letters with the diary of Pierre Meynard.

The brothers bent over him, their eyes darting. I watched Odollee to see if she betrayed any uneasiness. And I almost hated the beautiful mask of her face at that moment.

"Uncle Pierre was twenty when this was written," said John in a low voice.

"The last pages have been torn out," remarked the Judge. "Do you know who by?"

"No."

The Judge looked up sharply. "Don't you think you'd better tell me if I'm to form any accurate judgment?"

"I think—father did it."

"Why?

"Perhaps because of certain events recorded which he preferred not to leave lying about in a diary. I'm not certain of this, though."

"Hum-m!" He was studying the letters and diary. "Most extraordinary. Sustained effort. Also absence of fear always present in the criminal mind."

Louis, who I decided was not so strong as John, being more highly keyed, looked as if he were standing with difficulty. His thin sensitive hands clutched the back of a chair beside the Judge, the bones gleaming whitely through the skin. His face was gray. John, though more composed, was pale and disturbed.

"I should say, looking at this diary of a boy of twenty," said the Judge with a puzzled expression, "that these letters were written by the same hand grown older."

"The writing is very similar," John agreed in a low voice, "But Uncle Pierre, being dead, couldn't have written those letters."

"Why not?" demanded the Doctor, who had taken no part in the discussion. "On the contrary, it is entirely possible." He was now all interest.

"George," cried the Judge, "you are going to end your days in a sanitarium for mental defectives. If you don't stop this nonsense you'll be locked up before a year."

"The human body is to the mind what the telephone is to the voice—no more," declared the Doctor, paying no attention to the interruption.

"The receiver, transmitter, all the thousand-and-one things used in the construction of a single telephone, are necessary to the conveyance of that voice. Yet the voice exists without the telephone, and is in no sense dependent upon the telephone, does not need it, except as a temporary convenience.

"The telephone with all its intricacies would be useless without the human voice. Its very life tenancy depends upon the voice, for the moment man finds a better mode of communication, the telephone system will be waste—a dead body.

"Well, then, we see that spirit is to the intricate human machine what voice is to the telephone; but since *voice* does exist and expresses itself without the use of the telephone, why is it so impossible to suppose that a man thirty years on a higher plane may not write a letter merely because, having found a better, he discarded the machinery he once used as a temporary convenience?"

LOUIS sat down precipitously. He was more inclined to superstition than John and was evidently unnerved by his uncle's handwriting.

"My God!" groaned the Judge. "How can a man of brains—and I ad-

mit you have got brains, George—how can good gray matter—brilliant gray matter—be devoted to the concoction of such intricate nonsense? I might even say such profound nonsense!"

The argument between the Doctor and the Judge became hot. I learned later that these two lifelong friends found their greatest enjoyment in coming almost to blows over every possible subject, then forgetting all about it overnight.

"About this settlement of the inheritance tangle between your father and uncle," continued the Judge, "how long did it occur before your uncle's death? Some time before?"

John did not answer immediately. Then: "A week after grandfather's death, father and Uncle Pierre went up in the tower to settle the matter according to their father's wishes."

"Why did they go to the tower if it was to be a friendly bout?" demanded the Judge.

"Because dueling had fallen into disfavor and this was a matter between themselves," retorted Louis with equal sharpness. "Besides the storm was at its height and the house full of refugees below stairs."

"They chose that night to settle their private affairs?"

"I suppose it had been agreed upon in advance of the storm and they wanted to get it over. It meant just a matter of a few minutes' friendly sparring. They were only twenty and not greatly concerned perhaps over the storm. One gets indifferent out here."

"Well?" prompted the Judge.

"Well, father won," said John. "Not exactly as planned," he added hesitantly. "And Uncle Pierre, having lost, drowned himself."

"That same night?"

"Yes. He was later brought in by the tide."

The Judge studied the rug a l while. I wondered if he thought story of Pierre Meynard's death ugly one.

"How do you know it was suicid he asked presently.

LOUIS faced around, his neck to mantel.

"Since you want the whole story a Meynard was false to his o Uncle Pierre tried to kill fath Pierced him through the lungs.

"He proved a coward as well a traitor. He left father in the to for dead, clearly thinking his he had been pierced. Then, too l realizing the truth would come and that he would be hanged for murder of his brother, he drow himself.

"The fact that he left the house the storm could mean but one thi Suicide."

"I don't believe Uncle Pierre mea to kill father," put in John. "Fr what I hear of him, he worshipp father and wanted to divide t estate.

"He was hot-tempered, impulsiv but sweet and fine and proud. Ever body, white and black, adored hi Indeed, it has always seemed to m that feeling was rather strong amon our people in favor of Uncle Pier as the future master of the Island.

"To be perfectly fair, father is n and never has been popular wi the Islanders. I say this in justic to Uncle Pierre, because of your u kind and uncalled-for venom towar him just now, Louis."

Odollee flashed John a look o gratitude.

"This grilling is enough to mak me venomous," snapped Louis.

"Not toward Uncle Pierre."

"I'm merely trying to get at facts which may have to come into open court, Louis," interposed the Judge "so we'll know where we are. You

nt to spare your father. I think e can best do that by looking this ung lady's claim squarely in the ce and laying bare every angle of tack."

"I was wrong, of course," said ouis in swift metamorphosis, "and m ashamed of my attack on Uncle ierre. That he stabbed father was ndoubtedly due to sudden anger.

"He was, I'm told, very gay and so very quick to anger; but the ast man one would think of who ould try to kill his brother, then urn coward and take his own life." He buried his face in his hands.

OW Odollee, who had sat with owncast eyes during the greater art of the discussion, looked up at ouis: "Thank you," she said in a ow voice.

"I take it that the generous feelng which you both evidently entertain toward your uncle has been athered entirely from outsiders," aid the Judge, who seemed to have mind like a corkscrew. "Not from our father."

"No, I'm sorry to say father has always been very bitter. Practically all we know of Uncle Pierre we have gathered from the Islanders, from his diary, which showed great love for father, and from Sanchez.

"She taught us from infancy a sort of hero worship for Uncle Pierre, whom she seemed to worship as intensely as she hated father."

"Yet Sanchez is the woman who mixed your father and uncle to protect them both; then when it came to the test and she had to choose, she tried to swear your father into the place of heir. Evidently she loved him best at that time."

"I don't see that," exclaimed Louis, lifting his pale face from his hand, "if father had been the first born——"

"The truth would not have weighed one atom with her," said the Judge. "Feeling she held the power of bestowal in her hands, she would have bestowed on the one she loved best without a moment's hesitation. Truth and justice are abstractions to these old black women. Love is the only law they recognize."

He meditated a moment. "I shouldn't wonder if she is the ghost we've come to catch."

"We have thought of that," said Louis.

"Then why didn't you get rid of her? Hasn't she done enough devilment in this house?"

"Louis and I are devoted to her. She has been our mother in a sense. Still, we did talk with father about pensioning her and sending her away. He wouldn't hear of it.

"They have the most terrible quarrels, in which she shouts at him in her native tongue and he shouts back in the same tongue. But he won't—send her away. And, strangely, she's the only one who can quiet father when he has his—delusions."

"Hum-m! Something there that may be the very key we need. You said she mixed you up in infancy to be revenged on your father for something."

"Yes."

"Anyway," said Louis, "we have proved beyond all question that she has nothing to do with this other matter, the barred room. And things have occurred when she was in the room with us——"

But the Judge was not listening.

"That she grew to hate the man whom she had loved best as a boy, and that he has kept her in his house during all these years of bitter hate between them," he muttered, "is a riddle that only he and she can solve. I'm not trying to make out a case against your father," he added hastily. "But we must look every point in the face.

"And, of course, nobody knows what actually took place in the tower that night but your father—and perhaps Sanchez." He looked steadily at John. "You have only his word for it that his brother tried to kill him, pierced his lungs, left him for dead on the tower floor, and committed suicide."

"Of course, but ——"

"Are you trying to say that our father——" began Louis excitedly.

"I'm not trying to say anything. I'm trying to establish the facts, and to do that I must weigh all possibilities and hear the evidence which will refute or establish any possible charges this young lady may propose to bring against your father."

"Go on, Judge," from John.

"Mayn't your uncle have fled the island?"

"Impossible. All boats were torn from their moorings, battered to pieces. Even if he could have found a boat he knew the sea too well to undertake to weather that storm. Besides, suicide was in accord with Uncle Pierre's headlong impulsive nature.

"You see, he really loved father. Everyone says that. His action against father must have been a flame of anger, instantly repented and expiated."

"I SUPPOSE, buried out here and in time of great disaster, there was no coroner's inquest, nor certificate of death and burial?"

"No, but there are many living witnesses to both facts," said John gravely.

"There was no privacy about the burial? Pardon me, John, but you see the important thing is not how this young lady became the possessor of a ring and certain letters, but to establish Pierre Meynard's death and burial thirty years ago."

"That can easily be established. Many of the house servants are living who attended the fune Also many island folk, old folk children now grown up, who re ber it distinctly."

"Can we also establish how met—— But no, that's not im tant after all these years."

The Judge fell once more meditation. Doctor Blackman ha all through the discussion sha his face with a claw-like hand staring into the fire.

No one seemed inclined to tinue the subject of Pierre nard's death. A heavy silence ed. The cuckoo came out unab and made his announcement of and went back. Finally John sp

"Judge, the thing I haven't you——"

Judge MacCauley looked sharply.

"I hesitated because—well, as say, we are concerned first in ing father—I don't know wha make of it, but similar as those ters are to Uncle Pierre's wri and strange as the reappearanc that ring is, the most amazing puzzling thing is that those le purporting to come from U Pierre are in—in father's h writing."

"WHAT!" The Judge sprang excitedly. A peppery, explos man he was.

"The first letter, dated fift years ago, is written in w father's handwriting might h been like at that time," John w on. "The second is *like his wri now.* Bolder, but rather tremulo We both recognized it."

Here was surprise indeed. O lee's letters in Henri Meyna handwriting—dated fifteen yea apart, and bearing even the cha that had taken place in that time.

"A forgery," snapped Louis.

blundering forgery. The writer of false letters, not having a specimen of Uncle Pierre's writing, did the next nearest thing—forged father's hand.

Probably banking on the fact that twins so often duplicate one another in—if not in feature or characteristics, then, say, in handwriting. It is not unusual to see two sisters or brothers, who are not twins, write strikingly alike."

Odollee made no comment.

From a drawer at the bottom of the shelves John took some letters which he brought to the Judge. "These are letters from father to us when we were in school."

The Judge glanced through several, gave a snort and flung the letters on a table.

"I think we'd better drop this entire matter until your father is able to come down and join the discussion.

"The man who wrote you boys in New Orleans wrote those two letters to the Mother Superior of St. Cecilia's Convent. And he is the man to explain this young lady's relationship to himself and to you."

CHAPTER XVII

THE MAGNOLIA BLOSSOM

THE Judge's words were followed by a shocked pause. Well—true—there were the letters in Henri Meynard's handwriting setting forth that Odollee was Pierre's daughter.

The Judge, the boys themselves, did not doubt the writing. It really was a little too much to imagine that his hand could have been forged throughout two long letters, successfully duplicating even the change that would naturally have taken place in fifteen years.

John's eyes were fastened on Odollee. They were whipped back to the Judge. He was, without doubt, thinking of the possibilities conjured by the Judge's decisive statement regarding those letters, and he was not pleased.

Louis sat with his head in his hands. Doctor Blackman stared at Judge MacCauley, who was calmly polishing his glasses. He and Odollee alone appeared undisturbed.

After all, there was nothing to do but wait on the explanation of that violent man upstairs.

PRESENTLY Odollee said she was tired and would like to go upstairs. I thought of those dark corridors and sat still. As before mentioned, my upbringing had been materialistic. I didn't believe in ghosts, but preferred not to take chances on running into one.

I must have looked rather scared, for John immediately offered to see us to our rooms. "All this talk of ghosts has, I'm afraid, upset you."

"But I'm not afraid of ghosts," smiled Odollee. "I've seen and talked with them."

Doctor Blackman's face lighted. "Ah, you don't say. You don't say. We must have a long talk on this subject tomorrow."

"Well, I haven't seen and talked with any ghosts," I said, "and if they are in the habit of keeping company with you, Odollee, I prefer to sleep alone."

"Oh, they come only when I call them," she assured me. "And I promise not to call any while you are with me."

I felt she must be joking; though how she could joke and her father, with whom she had come to spend the summer, dead thirty years, or screaming at her, calling her an impostor—all this business about the letters being signed by a dead man and written in her "uncle's hand"

—well, I guess some folks can joke over an open grave.

"I'm sure I'll feel better if you see us up those dark stairs," I said to John. "I've got the creeps."

Louis had once more become the cordial host, and assured me I had nothing to fear. Said up there we wouldn't even hear anything. I decided the man was a bundle of nerves and was all in pieces himself over the mysterious goings on in this house. He was really charming.

Bidding us a pleasant good-night, the old men declared they, too, were tired and wanted to retire. Louis showed them to their rooms, while John escorted us.

A big lantern sat on one of the hickory tables on the roof patio and another hung outside our door.

John offered me his hand in good-night; then Odollee. And he forgot to let go of hers.

I left them gazing ecstatically into each other's eyes. Saying nothing. And looking highly pleased over it.

THE LAMPS had been lighted in our rooms and our bed was turned back for the night.

"Class, anyway," I remarked. "Real class."

Turning up the light on the dresser, I began undressing.

So Louis was a great musician like his uncle. But, as John said, there he had been with us. Also, why should he, as he pointed out, terrorize his own family and call in the Judge to catch himself?

But also, why everything in this strange house?

A delicate perfume caught my attention, and upon looking around I saw a fresh magnolia blossom in a slender vase on the bed table. Some one had put it there after we had gone out.

When Odollee finally closed the door and came into the bedroom, I was half undressed. If they'd sp a word, I hadn't heard it.

"Look, Odollee," I said, "a nolia blossom! My goodness, not only light our lamps and our beds down, but climb tre get flowers for us. Someone bro it after we left."

She turned with an odd viol and I had one glimpse of bur eyes; then I was looking at lowered lids. She made no ment, either of surprise or pleas but began undressing hastily.

My nerves were jumping, and mind being full of questions, w were taboo, I didn't speak furt Nor did she.

She put on a greenish kimono had bought in New Orleans, and deep gold of her hair against green made her bizarrely beauti Her sombre eyes were half clo as if fixed on unseen things. I mad. Why didn't she say so thing?

SILENTLY, I made the usual f inine search for a hidden man.

Odollee watched me while she t down her hair, a faintly mock smile on her lips. We said nothi

Getting into bed, I tried to go sleep. But my mind was go like a high-powered machine, a oddly that flower—the most incon quential circumstance of the da pestered me, as inconsequential thi do at times.

What meant Odollee's burni eyes at sight of that blossom? W so quickly lower her lids and ign so lovely a thing?

I tried to argue myself out of t feeling that that blossom was meaning gesture.

Actor folk were too imaginativ I told myself—looking for subt meanings in small actions. Natu ally—since our training was to mak every gesture, every turn of th

es and inflection of the voice con-
ey something definite.

Old Sanchez might have put it here to please us. However, she didn't look like a person given to ttle delicate attentions.

If John or Louis had brought the lower, they would have given it to is at dinner. Why had it been neaked up after we had gone—unless it did mean something.

PRESENTLY Odollee spoke. She was brushing out her hair. "My cousin John is most fascinating," she murmured.

Of all things! With so many important matters to discuss.

Oh well, the only matters unsettled were—where was Odollee's father? Who, in fact, was her father? Who had put her in the St. Cecilia Convent and paid her bills for fifteen years?

Who had written those letters in Henri Meynard's handwriting, under Pierre Meynard's name, that had brought us to this God-forsaken island in the Delta? And what would be the next move in the intrigue?

I gave it up. Why should I worry if she didn't?

"I love him," she added musingly. I looked at her in amazement.

"And he loves me," she continued, dreamily brushing her hair.

"Ancient history!" I snapped. "I knew that as long ago as ten o'clock this morning.

"If I hadn't, I had more evidence at dinner, to say nothing of that house that fell on me at the door just now. I wish everything else in this blamed fortress were as clear as that."

Then thinking she might suspect me of trying to pump her, I added hastily, "I must say you didn't waste any time. You only met the man this morning."

"Love is not measured in years," she said, with an air of one vastly experienced. "It is like God, without beginning—without end. We come together, a man and a woman from the ends of the earth—a look, a touch—and it is there. It has always been there, for eons and eons."

"How do you get that way?" I said.

"My soul leaped up to meet his soul," she went on, taking no notice of my interruption. "We embraced. It was done."

I sat up: "For gosh sake! You don't mean you kissed him the first day you met. I'll say you're swift."

"Oh, Jackie, you are as materialistic as Judge MacCauley," she laughed. "It was our souls that embraced. Ah, cherie, it is so wonderful when two souls embrace."

"Well, I'm not an authority on soul embraces," I said. "I had a boy friend once, and his good right-arm satisfied me. But look here—you've come here for a purpose—not to fall in love."

She shrugged her shoulders, lifted both her hands, snapping her fingers as if to flip the matter upon the four winds. "Not even love shall deter me."

I FELL asleep wondering about the confusion of this day, and dreamed that I was smothered by magnolia blossoms the while Louis played to me—wildly, gloriously.

CHAPTER XVIII

A MIDNIGHT VISITOR

CAN'T say just how long I had slept when suddenly I became wide awake. The room was pitch black except where the moonlight came through the little barred windows and fell in ribs of silver across the floor.

The pounding of my heart indi-

cated that my subconscious mind—the mind which is said never to sleep—had seen or heard something which it was trying to convey to me.

I shut my eyes in the aching tightness of a child frightened by the night-people fairy tales and tried to sleep again.

But the tighter I kept my lids the wider awake I became. A faint sound caught my ear in the direction of the bathroom and my eyes flew open. As I looked, a tall, dark form passed one of the windows, blotting it out, clearly outlined for a second against the light.

"Odollee," I cried, "there's some one in this room."

She sat up instantly.

"I saw some one in the moonlight," I said, and made a flying leap toward the dresser lamp. Something passed me at the foot of the bed.

With a suppressed scream I jumped back into bed, and Odollee found the night-light which was on her side. The room was empty.

I RAN into the sitting room. Also empty, and the door locked and bolted on the inside.

Odollee had followed me, laughing.

"You were dreaming," she said. "The door is double bolted on the inside and the windows barred. There couldn't have been anybody."

"I tell you there was and still is somebody in these rooms. He was hidden in here when we came in. He couldn't have gotten in afterward and he couldn't have gotten out, so he's hidden somewhere—likely in one of the bedroom closets."

Opening my bag I took out a small pistol Dad had given me the summer before when we were playing stock in Birmingham, where my line of small parts rarely kept me till the last act. I went back into the bedroom, with Odollee protesting angrily.

To tell the truth, I was n afraid of leaving the thing u plained than of any man I m find in there.

I looked under the bed, be every available piece of furnit Nobody there! I knew he must entered the closet toward which was headed as he passed me jerked the door open, stepping

"Come out," I called, "or I'll sh I'm going to count five and if are not out at the end of the c I shall shoot."

I began counting slowly.

"One—two—three——"

"Jackie, do come to bed. It is possible that anyone could have in here. You looked under eve thing and in both closets before went to bed. And how could any have gotten in since then—or Don't arouse the house."

But I was beyond reason——

"Four—five," I continued, and go.

I emptied six shots into t closet without bringing anybody or eliciting a sound.

Presently there was a terri pounding on our door. I had blurred impression of Odollee gett into a kimono, then faces; but kept my eyes on that closet.

ALL AT once I realized that I w screaming—and stopped.

"Look in that closet," I cri "There's somebody in there.

"Have I killed him?" I asked John went into first one, then other.

"You haven't killed anybody," said, "though you've put some ho in a dress or two."

I felt horribly silly but absolute unconvinced. I had both seen a felt someone.

Judge MacCauley said it was a hysterical hallucination caused b our previous talk of ghosts.

Doctor Blackman was silent.

All were agreed that no one could possibly have gotten in or out of the room with the one outside door double locked on the inside and every window having stationary steel shutters.

Curiously, nobody, unless it were the Judge and Odollee, seemed inclined to smile at me.

I am sure Louis was convinced that I'd seen something. John was puzzled and upset. Not a servant appeared.

But suddenly a perfectly enormous man—that is, enormous as to height—stood in the open door, fully dressed.

His face was pale and rather puffy looking. His hair, which was thick and grizzled and worn rather long, stood out all around his head, making it appear huge.

Even as he entered he ran the fingers of both hands through his hair. His full blue eyes under puffy lids stabbed each of us in turn.

He shouted: "What's the matter? What's the matter? Who fired a pistol? I heard shots—shots I tell you? What's going on in this room?"

"One of the ladies had a bad dream, father——" began Louis.

"Folks don't fire guns in dreams. I tell you I heard a shot. Six shots. Six!"

His hands twitched and were instantly doubled as if to strike some one. His massive shoulders were determinedly upheld.

"I fired them," I said, breaking in on the torrent of his words.

He kept running his hands through his hair, I thought to hide their twitching, his eyes darting, stabbing about the room. I had never seen such restless eyes.

"I saw some one in this room," I said rapidly. "A man. He ran into that closet. I felt his clothes fan me as he rushed past. And I shot at him."

"Ha! You shot at him, did you?"

He took a step toward me. "Little fool. Don't you know you can't shoot a dead man? I shot at him once. I was crazy.

"Well, then, now that you know what's going on in this house maybe you'll go back where you came from. I won't see you. You're impostors. Pierre is dead. Thirty years.

"I won't read the letters you brought from him. A dead man can't write. And he's dead. Dead, I tell you. I ought to know. I'll never do what you want. I'm not a coward. Devil me—drive me insane for lack of sleep—kill me eventually; but you can't frighten me.

"You two get out. In the morning I'll have the *Vale* waiting to take you home. You aren't wanted here. And you better go while you can.

"I'm likely to die any minute mysteriously. And you'll be involved. I have been almost smothered twice. I managed to get the door open and —fell out. They brought me to.

"I keep the door open now. You hear, I keep the door open. Some night I'll not get out and——"

Odollee said something which I did not catch because he went right on talking through her speech, shaking both fists, running his fingers through his hair, clinching and unclinching his hands and lifting his great shoulders sharply upright as if fearful that they might sag.

PAYING no attention to anyone else, he went on: "I'll die and leave a paper, if you don't go, saying you threatened to smother me."

He had come further into the room and was standing quite close to Odollee, bending above her. She stood straight and proud, looking up into his distorted face, a smile on her lips.

He paused for breath and she spoke, low and in a tongue which was neither Spanish, French nor English, a tongue that sounded like the mutterings of the old Malay woman.

He straightened as if she had slapped him in the face. Grew rigid. After an appreciable silence he fumbled in his pocket, drew out a handkerchief and lifted it toward his face. But it fluttered to the floor, and his nerveless fingers went on to his forehead as if he were unaware of the loss.

With no wish to serve the terrible old man, I stooped automatically to pick it up.

A faint, familiar odor reached me. I lifted the large square of fine linen to my nostrils—an expensively delicate perfume—there was no mistaking it. A rare, pungent scent.

LOUIS and John had been trying to soothe the old man throughout his torrent of words, trying to get him out. Now in the silence that held him they forced him out. Judge MacCauley slammed the door after him. We could hear them talking to him as they hurried across the roof.

I stood holding his handkerchief, which I had forgotten to restore. Odollee turned and quietly took it from me.

"Evidently drunk, or insane," remarked the Judge. "A fine night, this. If it's a sample of other nights to come, I think I'll toddle home. I'm an old man and need rest."

Doctor Blackman spoke soothingly to me, advised me not to let myself be disturbed, and after asking if we were all right now, said good-night.

Knowing it was useless, I locked and bolted the door, then went once more over the windows and walls, looking for an opening, a panel. Only solid stone and steel rewarded me. Not a crevice anywhere. Not a bit of wood. My mind was a ma strom.

Henri Meynard upstairs in l room this afternoon. . . . Sanch had just come from him when s slipped that note into Odollee's han commanding her immediate presen upstairs. . . .

He knew Odollee had brought l ters purporting to be from his de brother. I was sure his sons h not disturbed him to impart this i formation. Then how had he know if he had not seen and talk with her? What had she said th all at once took the fight out of him What tongue was this they had i common—that she knew he, but n his sons, would understand?

One thing only was certain—t form I'd seen etched against the wi dow had not been the great bulk Henri Meynard.

Other and terrifying thoughts a sailed me—the portraits in the din ing-room—Henri, large and bulk even in youth—Pierre, slender as girl. . . .

Marvelous music from on high. . . Pierre a great musician. . . . A slen der figure against the moonlight. . .

John and Louis had seen some thing in these rooms, something tha had dissolved before their eyes a our midnight visitor had dissolved And the thing they had seen ha been—horrible.

Louis had said: "My God! Wha a thing! Poor Father! No wonde his health is broken."

This huge man had not originall been the nervous type given to de lusions of the senses. He had a driven look—was, I thought, hal insane. Some power that even his tremendous strength of body and will could not combat was slowly undermining his reason.

"Little fool," he had said, "you can't shoot a dead man. . . . I've shot at it. . . . Now you see what's going

on in this house. . . . Some night I'll die mysteriously. . . . You had better get out before it's too late. . . ."

"ODOLLEE," I said when we were back in bed, having left the night light on, "I feel it in my bones that a little of this house is going a long way with me. I like adventure; but prowlers who come through locked doors and go out through brick walls or steel-barred windows would be too much for even the biggest adventure glutton. I never believed in ghosts before; but it could have been nothing else."

"Don't be silly. You dreamed. The dead are too busy on new planes to bother with us." I knew by her accent that she was more upset than she wanted me to think.

"New planes, my eye. Where do you get that stuff?"

"How can I say? Thoughts come —sometimes beautiful, sometimes terrible. No matter. They are there.

"The ghosts you are afraid of, do they leave Heaven to come back here where there is so much pain? Or perhaps the evil one is kind, and permits his victims to return for a vacation. Yes?"

The matter of ghosts thus set forth did sound rather absurd. But no flesh-and-blood man could have gotten out of those rooms, even if he had gotten in while we were at dinner and had been overlooked by me when I searched the rooms.

However, seeing Odolee was upset —between the ghost, perhaps, and the pleasant old party who invited us to pack and toddle, threatening to die if we didn't, and leave a paper accusing us, I dropped the subject. Pretended to fall asleep.

AFTER a long time I felt Odollee slipping cautiously up. At once I began breathing deeply. She sat still for a minute and I could feel her studying my face. I let out a faint snore. And she got out of bed, taking a long time to keep from waking me.

Through almost closed lids I saw her slip on her kimono. She bent, as I knew, to put on her bedroom slippers, then caught up my Paisley shawl lying across a chair and, wrapping it around her, she started out, taking a long time between steps as one does when afraid that the floor may pop.

I heard her slip a bolt in the outside door, furtively as a thief. A long silence. Then another bolt. After another wait, the lock turned. A draft fanned the curtains of the bedroom. A whiff of magnolia perfume lifted on the breeze.

The door closed softly. I didn't know what to do. I had no objection to her slipping out like a thief; but I had a distinct objection to that unlocked door.

After considerable thought I got up, locked it, and lay down on the divan to wait.

OUT of the confusion of my thoughts emerged the picture of Henri Meynard. And somehow I pitied the terrible old man.

Never had I seen a human creature so torn by nerves, and putting up so valiant a fight to dominate the conditions of his life. That he was not a coward was evidenced by his appearance in our door while the servants kept to their rooms.

Broken in body and mind—his spirit was unshaken. How determinedly he held his shoulders upright! What must he not have suffered to reduce that stubborn will to such wreckage!

Why was he, of all the house, fully dressed at this hour of the night? . . . A fresh magnolia in our room. . . . A signal, surely!

Had Odollee fallen asleep and thus failed to keep a tryst?

Or had she not known where to find him? He had shouted at her, "I keep the door open. You hear, I keep the door open!"

Was he giving her information under cover of his fury? She had slipped out immediately after he had informed her that his door was open.

Was his fury, after all, but a covering behind which he hid from his sons and which she understood?

It was all so confusing. Their understanding was so evident, I wondered if the men had noticed it.

YET there was no friendship between them. They clearly hated each other. And how can two people hate who do not know each other?

The mere fact of her claim as heiress to the estate did not justify the venom he felt toward her. He was rich and powerful, she a poor little convent-raised waif—her claim utterly absurd on its face. She should have been no more than an annoying fly above his table. One does not hate a fly. One swats it.

Judge MacCauley believed that Henri Meynard had written the letters she brought. Had Henri Meynard raised and educated her?

It looked plausible. The old Malay woman who had brought her to the convent had been a servant in this house since the birth of Henri himself: the Chinese messenger who had brought the duplicate ring and letter was here too.

But, if so, why repudiate her? Why sign his brother's name, in the first place? . . . Unless for the purpose of repudiating her—in case his plans for her miscarried.

Had they miscarried — perhaps through that same old woman who had been playing a sinister part in this family for fifty years? Had she been intrusted with the ring and letter with instructions to redeem Odollee, and do something different with her? Had she, instead, brought the girl here to ruin Henri?

Why had Henri Meynard refused to send Sanchez away when he knew she hated him—unless because he *dared not.*

"A great wrong has been done this house," Odollee had said. . . . "Can never be righted now. . . . But belated justice. . . . I am dedicated to hate. . . ."

She was gone so long that, in spite of my perturbed thoughts, I fell asleep.

A soft knock. "Jackie! Jackie!" I sprang up.

"Odollee?" I called.

"Yes."

I let her in. The clock on the mantel pointed to five.

"I couldn't sleep and went out for a breath of air," she said.

It was plausible, but argued a good deal of courage in a girl of eighteen—and as she passed me I caught a faint breath of a haunting perfume—the perfume of that fine linen handkerchief left on the divan, also of the one dropped by Henri Meynard.

And only by being in a man's arms can a girl carry away the perfume he uses.

Had she actually been in the arms of that terrible old man who had ordered her off the island? Was all this show of hate on his side acting? And was she playing his game?

But I was learning the fine art of silence. Also I was beginning to think that while a summer in a convent might be less exciting than a summer in a haunted house on a forsaken island in the Delta, it would also be more peaceful.

"Odollee," I said presently, "would you please do your breathing hereafter in the daytime? I'll stand for a lot; but not for leaving that door

pen while I sleep. The next time I won't stay up to let you in. That's flat. And somebody will find you locked out next morning. I don't want to be cross, or mean, but human nature has a limit."

"Yes, it has, Jackie," she said softly. "And you are quite right. I won't go out again at night. Oh, I wish——"

"What?"

"Nothing."

"That you were out of all this?"

"No. That it weren't so dreadful."

When she did not continue, I said: "Well, there's one thing certain—no more sleeping in the dark. I prefer to smother from coal-oil fumes and *see* who comes in here. The thing I can't get over is that all those shots and my screams failed to rouse the servants. It's pretty clear that *they* are used to terrifying noises, and keep to their rooms."

"Yes. It's amazing that they stay. But they wear charms—and keep to their rooms of nights."

How much she knew about this house!

Well, I decided, I'm going to have a talk with the Judge. He seems to me the only entirely sane person on the place besides myself. I'll speak to him to-morrow.

Ah, to-morrow——

CHAPTER XIX

A KINGDOM IN THE SEA

SINCE that night I have been convinced that if the world were to explode when I had sleep on the brain, I'd find a nice little rock somewhere on which to finish my nap.

Nothing further happened, and it was daylight when I awakened. Odollee was sound asleep. I slipped up and, dressing with care so as not to awaken her, went out on the roof.

If I had had any foolish notions of having exhausted the surprises of this house of gloom and mystery and suspected intrigue, I now realized that I had only begun to discover the inexhaustibility of the island.

The giant trees which made the grounds so repulsive on the front of the house were equally thick and enormous on the west, closing in on two sides of the roof, giving it the appearance of being suspended among their green tops. The air was like velvet.

But it was the east and south of the island that made me gasp. No trees obscured the view here and it was as different from the waste of sea-grass and marsh on the north and the primeval forest on the west as if it were another country.

Vast rice fields were criss-crossed with dark lines which I knew to be irrigation ditches; fields of young sugar-cane flung off toward the bay.

The roads had been treated with crushed oyster-shells and wound like white ribbons through the dark green of orange and avacado groves and mammoth truck gardens.

A white beach rimmed the Gulf on the south.

Innocent of hill or knoll, the gorgeous pattern stretched away from the house like a brilliant carpet unrolling to a far sweep of water—blue water meeting green water where the Gulf and Barataria Bay drew together.

And here on the very knees of the two, as if to defy them, nestled a village in a glory of light, broken now and again by the rounded tops of umbrella china-ball trees, or a scrub oak. High above the cottages rose a church spire sharply etched against the early light.

I SAT on the stone parapet out of reach of the trees. Dew dripped from them, falling plunk-plunk on the gables and on the patio.

And never, except in pictures of the West Indies, have I seen such a sunrise. In a liquid vastness of shimmering green and blue, with incrustations of gold, wallowed the huge hub of the sun.

Scarlet spokes, like monstrous bloody fingers, reached out of a phosphorous sea into the sky, which was a caress of rose and lavender and soft pearl lights—a witchery of fire and flood, the whole measureless span of the sky flaming with incredible tints.

"Well, this is my complete idea of magnificence," I said aloud. "And, oh boy, it spells money. If Odollee can horn in on this by love or law, believe me, it's better than doing one-nighters."

What an estate! I hadn't known there was such magnificence lying loose in the world. It wasn't just wealth. They were czars—these Meynards—lords of all they surveyed. Lands, houses, fields and pastures, a resort island, all theirs. The villagers, their tenants.

It was no wonder they wanted to keep it intact by succession. Otherwise it would long ago have become just a group of little estates, even passing to other names through the marriage of the girls.

What wonder if crimes had been committed to obtain this enchanted land? If they should be committed again!

My gaze drifted over the peaceful lawns; foxgloves massed against the servant's houses; flowers blooming out of season—chrysanthemums belonging to fall of the year beside the bridal-wreath of early spring, hibiscus burning above snowy Easter lilies, with Easter long past. A veritable paradise afloat in the sea—for the lucky first-born.

And for two generations a malign old Malay negress, abetted by nature, had thrown the succession into co fusion.

I now understood the old cr ture's mirth over John's bringi out on his boat the girl who came claim part of his inheritance. F whatever intrigue this house h bored was known to Sanchez.

FROM the vast serenity of light a color my gaze came back to the to er, rising high above the tallest tre with its little squar room—once t light-keeper's room, no doubt crowned by the huge lantern. A thinking of the story Henri's se had told, I seemed to look throu the brick walls and backwa through thirty secretive years, in that little square room lighted by a oil lamp.

Two young men facing each oth with swords—the end for one, kingdom; for the other, povert Outside, a storm battling to destro what these two fought to hold. Th frightened islanders, the house-ser ants far below—a quick thrust of sharp blade—a dark night—and th convenient sea. A body washed bac days later.

THE TREES rustled as if whisper ing together. The gulf sighed an sighed, and dew dripped with in creasing plunks on the roof an tower. To my overwrought mind i seemed that the trees were weepin for poor Pierre Meynard, who ha lost his fair inheritance because hi brother had envied him.

If this were not so, why did Henri Meynard believe he was pur sued by the malign ghost of hi brother, who had loved him in life?

Moreover, Henri Meynard, what ever his faults or crime, was not a physical coward. Nothing less than an absolute conviction that he was pursued by a supernatural being

could deprive him of his natural fighting spirit.

He believed Pierre Meynard was dead—and so did Odollee—now. She had announced quite calmly after meeting Fine Linen and Faint Perfume that the father she had expected to meet here had been dead sixteen years. Why sixteen instead of thirty?

I thought of how carefully she had always been guarded; of her positive assurance that no *bodily* harm would come to us. Had our rooms been strategically chosen to this end? And also to simplify a necessary meeting, since the servants probably came up here only to clean the rooms of mornings and to prepare them for the night.

That the brothers would not have put us on the roof, for all the comfort of the apartment, I felt sure. These were not guest rooms; yet Sanchez had not hesitated in her choice.

Nor had they breathed the mustiness of unused rooms, but were fresh and sweet, a fire laid—as if waiting. Isolation and safety. Safety from what?

And what about our midnight visitor?

My eyes, turning toward our rooms, fell on the low roof, the huge chimney lifting but three feet above—quite large enough to admit Sanchez, or the Chinaman who had served as a messenger to bring Odollee here—sent to call her to keep her tryst.

I LAUGHED aloud. So much for the ghost who walked into steel-barred rooms!

With a sense of great relief over this simple explanation of the mysterious occurrence of the night I went down to give the house the "once-over" by daylight.

I found it looked much better at sunrise than at sunset. Or perhaps, the ghost bunk settled, a beautiful estate and a sunrise that would have decked paradise, had changed my outlook.

Susceptible to fine stage settings, naturally optimistic and accustomed to let things drift, I began to foresee a delightful summer in this splendid old house.

Louis was alone in the library, his arm on the mantel, gazing into the fire when I entered.

"Good morning, Miss Tarver. I hope you have recovered from your meeting with the ghost last night," he said, taking my hand with a palpable effort at lightness.

"I don't believe very much in ghosts," I said, "particularly in the daylight—and such daylight as you have here. I've been looking at the sunrise from the roof and I declare it's as if these islands were swimming in blue haze."

"It isn't far from that. Isn't Miss Meynard coming down to breakfast?"

"Yes. She hadn't finished dressing."

HE PRESSED me into a big, cozy chair and went back to the mantel, his eyes going again to the door.

"Meynard — isn't it a Spanish name?" I asked, to make conversation.

"No. Why?"

"You and your brother have the Spanish cast of features."

"We are of Spanish extraction. But we are French also. That's what Creole means, though many people confound it with octoroon.

"John will be in presently. He is telephoning Mrs. Thompson over on Le Petit Meynard to ask her if she won't come over to Stone Gables as chaperon for you girls.

"She is a charming woman and a distant relative of ours. As you are

to be our guests, we thought you might feel more at home with an older woman in the house."

John entered and after greeting me turned to Louis. "Mrs. Thompson will be over after breakfast."

He strolled up to the mantel and, resting his elbow thereon, unconsciously fell into the pose held by Louis.

How alike these two were—even in poise and gesture—and yet how different! But the difference was a matter of character rather than line—a something you felt more than saw.

"I told her that you would come over for her," John was saying.

"That *I* would come over for her!"

"Yes. I'll stay with the girls."

"You'll go for her and I'll stay with the girls," said Louis quietly. "I intend to show them over the island."

Their eyes met, held. Almost imperceptibly, Louis' hand clinched.

"Let's all go for her," I said.

John laughed and turned away. "A good idea."

But Louis looked sullen.

"Judge MacCauley is ramsacking the house," laughed John, "for secret panels and proposes to investigate all the dungeons on the roof where the rooms give on low gables.

"I don't like to have him do it. The passage may not even be securely floored, and in the darkness he may have a bad fall. I recollect father was afraid for us to test them for use as private caves when we were boys. But the Judge is determined to solve the ghost problem materially."

"Do you think he was disturbed last night?" asked Louis.

"I think not—except by Miss Tarver's dream. It must have been a dream, you know, Miss Tarver."

"You said you and your brother saw something in there one nigh I reminded him.

"Yes, but I feel the Judge's planation of it as the materiali tion of repeated suggestion is logical one. Don't you? We kn that thought is a definite power."

"What did you think you saw

LOUIS, who I felt gave no cre to the Judge's theories, frowned a turned toward the book-shelves wi an impatient gesture.

John laughed. "I don't want transfer the suggestion to you. Y see, we knew what to expect—it h been described to us by father—a we saw it."

"But I believe, like the Judge, th the whole thing is explainable—n supernatural."

"Nevertheless you are sensitive suggestion." He kept watching t hall door.

"I wonder what's keeping Odoll so long?" I said, following his eye "She must be making herself ver lovely."

"She has no need to make her self lovely," replied Louis, comin back to the hearth. "She is perfect Her eyes are a caress when they res on one."

I stole a furtive glance at John. He was regarding Louis with a strange, steady expression. Louis catching his brother's curious regard, stared in astonishment; then understanding spoke in his dark eyes.

How expressive are the faces of these Latin folk with whom but to look is to love. It was so absurd. A girl who was at once a mystery and their enemy.

For my part I prefer the deliberation of the Western mind. Find out first if you're right—disposition, background, often bank account—then go ahead.

THE silence was growing embarrassing when Odollee came in followed by Judge MacCauley and Doctor Blackman. Everybody was cheerful or determined to appear so.

Louis referred to his father's continued absence, and said he rarely came down to breakfast. Which entirely satisfied me. I hadn't admired what I'd seen of the old man.

John proposed the trip to Le Petit Meynard, suggesting a swim while over there.

"The beach is excellent and the swimming fine," he said as if nothing were on his mind but to make us have a good time, and as if nothing could be on ours but to have it.

"Great!" I cried.

What the deuce! Why worry? The Meynards were rich and handsome. John was falling in love with Odollee—maybe Louis. And whatever they thought of her pretentions, both of them were determined to make us welcome.

The ghost was a chimney-way messenger. What matter if Odollee's mystery was never solved? We would have a glorious vacation, and if she didn't marry one of the twins, she could go with me to New York and get in a show. Her beauty would make her. She was a "type," and had "class."

"I don't swim," confessed Odollee sweetly as if she weren't here to rob them or to accuse them of robbing her.

"I've nothing to do but teach you," responded John with a boyish smile.

"What about the hands?" asked Louis. "You know the extra help is coming over to-day from Grand Isle, and if the fruit isn't taken care of——"

"Oh, I told Bradley to get the bunk houses ready," replied John, "and I'll be back by twelve."

He launched into an explanation to us. A bunch of Chinamen circulated from island to island in the fruit season. The fruit ripened so rapidly these hot days that the inhabitant labor could not handle it fast enough.

Louis' dark face was like an open book in which one read his every mood. And he was certainly not pleased at this moment. I thought perhaps he took the fruit more seriously than John.

I STARTED upstairs, ostensibly for my hat—in reality to have a look at the opening in our chimney—but Louis sent Sing Lu upon the run for both our hats.

When I again thought of examining the chimney I was too dazed by the tragic events, the overwhelming mystery into which we had been plunged to feel more than a passing interest in the puerile experiences of my first night in that house of horror.

CHAPTER XX

WHERE HAVE I SEEN THAT FACE?

HE JUDGE asked to be excused from our excursion to Le Petit. He had some work to do, and the Doctor said he would like to go through the diaries and other records left by the two previous Meynards; this being the only reference made to the serious business before us.

When we were ready to start for Little Island, Louis informed John shortly that he was not going. The hands would not work if left to themselves.

John argued that Bradley (apparently an overseer) could take care of them. It seemed to me Louis was merely trying to make John stay at home, since he mentioned that John had been away and he, Louis, was

entitled to a day off. He was like a peevish child.

John laughed and told him to come along; nobody wanted him to stay at home and he knew he wasn't needed.

After some further discussion, good-humored on John's side, dark-humored on Louis', he yielded. The weaker character, he tried to dominate his brother, who cheerfully refused to be dominated.

On the ferry I understood Louis' objection to his brother's company. John frankly and boldly took charge of Odollee and Louis was left to me. He was too well-bred to show himself anything but a pleased and charming escort. However, I saw him watching John and Odellee darkly.

What would happen if two Creole brothers fell madly in love with the same girl? Oh well, time enough to worry over that later on.

THE channel was not more than two hundred yards wide at this point and the ferry was merely a flat boat pulled across the channel by two negroes who manipulated two pulleys on a wire rope fastened to an oak on each bank.

We made a tour of the island on foot. It was quite small and covered with sand and a few scrub oaks; but it was dry, and had a fine beach.

There were about two dozen crude cottages built of logs and a rather good-sized hotel, very low, also built of logs, with a bath-house attached.

Louis explained to me: There was no golfing or polo on the pleasure island; but there were a good tennis court, deep sea fishing, swimming of mornings, and dancing of afternoons and evenings in the big dining-room of the hotel, and hunting on the main island.

The basin, which had been a bayou before the sea cut through, was full of fishing boats and small motor launches.

It was not a wealthy playground, but attractively rustic in a paradise of sunlight and serenity between the blue sky and the green sea.

And it came to me that Henri Meynard, whatever his eccentricities, was a shrewd business man. He had not let the Gulf get the better of him by tearing off a piece of his land and covering it with unproductive sand.

We were passing a small clump of stunted oaks surrounding a rather isolated cottage at the north end of the island facing the old basin inlet from Barataria Bay.

"There's a very interesting character in that cottage," remarked Louis. "She is a permanent resident. Reads six or eight languages, has a most amazing collection of books, and yet is a deaf mute.

"She seems to have plenty of money, but lives in austere simplicity, employs no servant, and, so far as I know, leaves the island rarely.

"In fact, she hasn't left the island in fifteen years. Yet she had traveled all over the world and is very interesting. Would you like to meet her?"

He and I were walking some distance ahead of John and Odollee.

"Why, how can she be interesting? And how would I talk with her?"

"Come. I'll show you."

HE STOPPED and pounded on the little gallery floor.

"I could shout my head off and she wouldn't hear, but she feels vibrations," he explained.

They have invented "shock-absorbers" for automobiles, but not for human beings. Prepared as I thought I was for anything that might happen, I wasn't prepared for the apparition in that doorway.

There, dressed exactly as she had been the previous day, except that

she was without hat and veil, stood the strange woman of the boat. She was taller than I had thought her even; her square bony shoulders and hawk-like countenance more pronounced; her eyes more piercingly black.

Her color was more shocking than it had appeared to be in that one glimpse I'd had behind the veil when she had turned squarely toward me after the scene I'd witnessed.

Again I felt that here was a dead face in which the eyes alone fought against the decay of nobility. A mouth that had long since lost the gift of laughter. A generous mouth whose sweetness had gone dry.

No smile welcomed us, but looking from us to John and Odollee, who were still some distance away, then back to us, she made a motion for us to enter, at the same time lifting a small slate and pencil suspended at her side and writing swiftly: "You are welcome."

Explained was her discourtesy on the train, her aloof silence in the cabin. Perhaps also what had appeared a secretive tryst with the old Malay, the snapping of fingers to attract attention—signs instead of words—their silence which had seemed so menacing; but it did not explain that amazing scene on the boat.

Louis took the slate from her and wrote: "Mrs. Gerodes, this is Miss Tarver. She is our guest and we are showing her and her friend over the island. I thought you might show them your books."

Her eyes held me singularly. It was as if some ugly hurt lay behind those strange eyes. I wondered if it were her affliction. But I could not recollect that I had ever seen a mute who was other than cheerful and happy.

She gave me her slim, hard hand, and as her eyes met mine I was swept by a swift certainty of having seen her before—when she had looked differently.

She seemed to sense my feeling, and something like a threat leaped across the silence between us. She lifted her slate courteously as if to ask if I had something to say.

I wrote: "Have I met you before somewhere? Your face is terribly familiar. I mean before yesterday."

She read, gave me a darting glance, then shrugged her shoulders and, lifting her free hand in a foreign gesture, wrote rapidly: "It is possible. I have been to so many places. But I don't recall. You may have been quite young. In which case my face might have stayed with you and yours outgrown me."

A logical, easy explanation. But I was troubled by a sense of evasion and something like panic in her. This gift of *feeling* folk, the real folk, beneath their words made me aware of an alert mind here, watchful and on the defensive.

ODOLLEE seemed to hesitate when she saw us seated on the gallery; but Mrs. Gerodes beckoned her with a cordial gesture, her thin lips yielding as by an effort to a smile pathetically like the laughter that overlies tears. There was cruelty as well as bitterness in her face; but I felt that the cruelty had resulted from the bitterness and was not innate.

Both expression and carriage were arrogant and commanding. There was no sense of inferiority here, no self-fear, but the assurance of one who has generations of culture, power and place in the background.

Odollee and John sat on the edge of the porch. Mrs. Gerodes detached the slate from her belt, and it passed from hand to hand among us.

Though left-handed, she wrote with great rapidity, and was very clever, even amusing, for all that her eyes denied her own amusement.

She showed us her books, which were in heaven alone knows how many languages. Poetry, history, philosophy. Many of them in rare bindings. Schopenhauer was her favorite philosopher.

"He knew the truth," she wrote, "that the only happiness in this life is found in the ability to take pleasure in pain."

What suffering must have been hers to develop in her agreement with this grim philosophy.

HER cottage was furnished austerely. No rugs; no curtains; a leather couch for a bed; a few hickory chairs. However, a chest that must have cost hundreds of dollars, a single Chinese vase four feet tall, some fine glassware and two magnificent etchings precluded the idea of poverty.

She told us she had brought the chest from Egypt and the glassware she had found in India in a junk-shop.

Each time her eyes met mine I felt increasingly that I ought to know this woman. And that she was afraid I might at any minute recall her. Why should she be afraid?

She was not afraid I'd blab about the scene on the boat. She brought it up herself. Addressing John, she wrote: "Miss Tarver came upon me quite embarrassingly yesterday when I thought I'd lost the most valuable possession I have on earth—a snuff-box.

"The workmanship is rare, encrusted with jewels; but its real value is sentimental. It was given me by someone I loved very dearly once. I don't use snuff, but I am never without the box."

She took an exquisite box from her pocket and showed it to us. Two strange things assailed me. There could be no doubt of her sentimental regard for the box. Her eyes softened amazingly. Even her handling of it expressed love, and this was a strange thing to see in a woman with such bitter eyes and a mouth unacquainted with smiles.

The second strange thing was that, for all her very real sentiment for the box, she lied. I'd seen the box on the deck while she continued her frantic search.

The chance of my having noticed the box among a pile of other things was so unlikely that I am sure it didn't occur to her that I would doubt her. Or if I did—she had taken the wind out of my sails, so far as gossip was concerned, by telling it herself and giving an entirely plausible explanation.

Then what meant the look she gave me when I put this most frequent question: "Haven't I met you before?"

She wasn't amused nor inquiring. Nor was she even uncertain. She was startled. . . . And she watched me every minute now for a sign of definite recollection.

And yet, if I had met her, could I have forgotten? Hers was not a face one would ever forget, no matter how casual the meeting. Besides, if I had met her, it had not been casual—not pleasant. Oddly, I at once liked her and disliked her. She both fascinated and repelled me.

I WENT away haunted by her eyes. They were like a lost word or a half-forgotten strain of music struggling on the edge of my memory all morning; almost reaching my upper mind, then falling back into the deeps of forgotten things. I pitied and feared her.

"Poor creature," I said when we'd left her.

"I don't think she needs sympathy," said John. "Her mind is a treasure house."

"She's a friend of yours?" I was tremendously curious about this wo-

man whom I both liked and disliked.

"No. Oh, no. I doubt if she could ever come close enough to be friends. She is always cordial if one drops in on her; but I've tried without success to induce her to come and see us—I'm sure Father would enjoy her."

"Has she never called?"

"Never been inside the house. I've seen her once or twice on the island, but only at a distance. Yesterday was the first time she was ever on the *Vale*. Made the same mistake you did and asked me if she might come along with us."

Then because I was tired of thinking I asked, "Why didn't you tell us that wasn't the regular boat.'

"I thought you might not like to accept an invitation from a stranger, and it seemed a shame for you to go back when we were carrying the mail for the disabled mail boat and had to stop at all the islands."

CHAPTER XXI

COUSIN LILAH "RECEIVES WORD"

WE found Mrs. Thompson, "Cousin Lilah" they called her, in a beach chair. She was a lovely, white-haired woman, typically "Southern," serene, smiling and disinclined to physical exertion.

Odollee, Louis and I, after introductions and the necessary amenities of small talk, went up to the bathhouse to change for a swim, leaving John with Mrs. Thompson—to explain us, I thought.

As nothing had been said to indicate that she was not returning with us to Stone Gables according to her telephone conversation this morning with John, I was surprised when I came out to be told that she had received word from her daughter in New Orleans asking her to come home on the mid-weekly boat.

As there was no telephone or telegraph communications between the islands and the mainland, and the only possible mail was that which we'd brought on the *Vale* the previous day, I wondered how she'd *received word* since her telephone conversation with John this morning.

John had, after a rather lengthy talk with her, joined us in the surf. He and Louis in no sense neglected me, but it was easy to see that a beautiful dark princess with dead gold hair held the centre of the stage in two pairs of Spanish-American eyes.

It was when we were coming out of the surf in a glorious state of exhaustion that John told us we were not to have the lovely, languid Mrs. Thompson for a chaperone.

"She says," he went on quizzically, "that you don't really need a chaperone. That people do more as they please these days than formerly, and that Louis and I aren't entirely modern—too far removed for its tainting influence—or we would never have thought of a chaperone."

"For my part," I said, "I've never been bothered much by proprieties. Actor folk—that is, a good average of them—contrary to general opinion, have morals without bothering over the forms of morality. I've known a lot of other folk, a good average, too, who are dressed up in all the forms of morality without having the meat of it underneath."

"Anyway," put in Louis, "Miss Meynard, having the same name, appeases the proprieties. And Sanchez is hardly a servant in the strict sense. More like one of the family, having been foster-mother to two generations of Meynards."

It was clear that the proprieties must be served in some fashion in their minds at least.

"But I thought Cousin Lilah said this morning——" began Louis inquiringly of John.

John explained about Mrs. Thomp-

son having received word which prevented her fulfilling her promise. He did not look at Louis as he made this explanation.

"*Received word?*" Louis demanded in astonishment.

"Yes—a letter—overlooked in last night's mail—received this morning after our talk on the phone."

John could not lie comfortably. He was slapping with determined intentness the breakers that overtook us. Louis gave him a sharp look and asked nothing further.

STAGE experience having taught me to completely disrobe and dress, changing from street to evening clothes, from shoes to head-dress in the space of six to eight minutes between the fall and rise of curtains, I was on the beach fully clothed long before the others were out of the bath-house.

"Cousin Lilah" put aside her book and began chatting about the activities of the hotel.

It was a glorious morning, with the sun a golden flood, the sea like a congregation of lovers sighing against the white beach.

I began to hope for the best. There was no sense in solving mysteries while the sun was high, the air so soft, and love on the wing, so to speak. And yet—suddenly I was telling Mrs. Thompson about my experience of the previous night.

"Just the same," I added, "I think there must be a natural explanation of all this ghost bunk if one could find it."

She laughed softly. "There is. But I shan't try to find it. And I should advise you not to."

She seemed to turn something over in her mind, then, sitting down on the side of her bed, said with a wry smile: "I am not a Christian. I'm not anything. I believe that this life which I know is all there is."

"Oh!" I gasped. It seemed so terrible that a woman of her age should be without God.

"Shocking, isn't it?" There was a whimsical light in her fine gray eyes. "Don't think I boast of it. I merely tell you that you may see I am free of the attendant superstitions of those who think there's an unseen life."

She was silent for a space as if in doubt, then coming suddenly to a decision, "You are a sensible child," she said, "and I am convinced you are going to need all your common sense before you leave Stone Gables. Strange things happen in that house.

"One summer, when my husband and I were visiting Le Petit, I was summoned to the main island by Louis in the night. Their father had been found on the floor half out of his room fighting for air, almost dead, and from his room issued the most suffocating sulphurous fumes.

"The house was in terrible confusion. The black boy, who was Henri's body servant and slept in a small room adjoining his, told that, hearing a moaning from his master, he'd jumped up and run into the room and that on the opposite side of the bed the head and face of a bodyless man had been seemingly suspended above the bed.

"The room had been so dark that he could not have seen a man's face, but it had given off a peculiar blue-white light that made every feature distinct.

"The room had been full of sulphur fumes. He had run out with a scream which evidently had awakened Henri, who must have been sleeping very soundly. He sprang up, got to the door and fell half outside.

"When Henri's sons, sleeping some distance away, reached him and entered the room one of the windows was open and the Gulf breeze coming in strongly, but the fumes were still clearly discernible. So that much of

the boy's story was true they knew. Henri would not talk about it with them.

"However, the following day the boy disappeared from the island and Henri, who was still very weak, told me confidentially that Pierre had taken him."

"But," I cried, my hair prickling, "they told us Pierre had been dead thirty years."

"So he has," she sighed.

"Then it's absurd—you surely don't believe——"

"I told you I am a materialist," she smiled. "I am not telling you these things to frighten you. You'll hear them all.

"You see, John felt that my position as one of the oldest friends of the family and a distant relatives entitled me to an explanation of your and Miss Meynard's presence here. I felt it might be better if you heard them from one who does not believe in the supernatural.

"Poor Henri! His and Pierre's rooms adjoined and Henri once told me himself that he had to move out because Pierre still occupied his room and would give him no rest.

"Yet Henri Meynard is not the type of man from whom one would expect such an amazing statement. A man whose God is Mammon. But I know there's something behind all this.

"How much Henri himself knows has always been a question in my mind—more than he tells, I feel sure. In fact, I sometimes have thought his state of mind and health was due to entirely different causes—that the ghost stuff was a creation of his own to cover something else."

"But he surely didn't try to smother himself," I objected.

"No. That puzzles me. He wants frantically to live. But I feel the explanation is at hand. I wish I were going to be there when it is."

"Why, aren't you?"

"I'm not wanted there."

"Not wanted? But they asked you."

"Ah yes. And about an hour after John's phone call a note was slipped under my door——"

"In the hotel?"

"In the hotel—telling me my presence was not required at Stone Gables. It was signed by Henri. A brusque note. Unbelievably rude. I showed it to John."

"So, you see," she went on after a pause, "Henri is not so sick as John and Louis thought. He knows everything that's going on in that house; has some one spying even on his sons and knew immediately about this phone call."

"He's a devil," I said.

"Quite. And yet I pity him."

I WONDERED if she knew about the duel, as I'd gathered from the brothers that it was not generally known. That, in fact, they had but recently learned of it; and especially Louis had been disinclined to reveal their knowledge.

Even John had yielded only and because he felt that the whole story must be told if they were to get at the psychology of the thing instead of scraping the rind.

She answered my thought by saying: "I wonder how the older boys would have settled the estate if Pierre had not been drowned?

"A fencing bout, probably. They were both excellent fencers, though Pierre was the more skillful.

"John and Louis will probably settle their problem over a game of cards or chess. I understood John is for an equal division, but Louis clings to the old idea of one head for the house and a big estate."

"Mrs. Thompson," I said, "you needn't answer me if this is too per-

sonal. But it seems to me very strange that Pierre, who was popular and believed by many to be the older twin, should haunt Henri, who profited by his death, and that Henri should believe Pierre, who loved him, wanted to kill him."

"That's treason, child," she whispered. "In this Old-World state of ours there are men who are above suspicion. The Meynards are such. I'm the only person in their world, perhaps, who would dare voice doubt of them, as I did once to Henri.

"You see I dare to doubt God," she added with a smile. "And even I wouldn't dare voice all the things I thought at that time. But I loved Pierre.

"It was only a boy and girl affair; yet if he had lived I might have been mistress of Stone Gables. Naturally, I would be biased."

"Do you think it possible, Mrs. Thompson, that Pierre did not die that night? That he and Henri quarreled; that he disappeared and another man was buried in his name?"

"Quite impossible, child. That was a night of great disaster. Many islanders were almost completely submerged, many lives lost, not only here but all along the coast of the mainland.

"The lower parishes were so busy with their own carnage that they were unable to look after the islands. It was, in fact, a week before the extent of their disaster reached us. Meanwhile, all island boats had perished.

"There was no way in which Pierre could have left the island. Naturally he would have been seen if he had been alive after the storm. The missing were being checked, the living accounted for—all working to bury the dead. Pierre would have been among the workers if alive."

"Maybe he was hurt and confined to his room?"

"In that case Henri wouldn't have dared to say he was dead. Too many servants in the house. Besides, how hide from Pierre a burial in his name or prevent his repudiating it once he were well? No, my child, a crime might easily be hidden in these islands. But not a man."

"Couldn't he have been imprisoned —say in the tower—by Henri?"

"If so, he must have escaped some time, if he later married and had a daughter. In that case, what would have prevented his exposing his brother's treachery?

"Suppose he had been imprisoned ten years—allowing for your friend, it couldn't have been longer—he would then have been thirty. He couldn't have changed beyond recognition. Both boys were well known in New Orleans and all along the coast. He would have had no trouble in establishing his identity."

"Maybe he didn't want to blacken the family name by exposing his brother. They seem very proud."

"So they are. But human nature is older than family pride. And though Pierre was so sweet, so generous and lovable, he had also a tempestuous nature; fierce passions; capable of beautiful sacrifice, but also of devastating ugliness if pushed too far."

She smiled whimsically. "You are highly imaginative as well as sensitive and keen. But of one thing you may be sure: however Pierre Meynard met his death, he met it the night of the storm. He never left the island. That is the one impossibility."

"Then tell me," I cried, "what do you make of Odollee's situation?"

"That it is most amazing. Yet not more so than many things that have come within the lives of the amazing Meynards.

"Isn't it amazing that twentieth century Americans should continue to cling to the idea of a succession, which leaves one son enormously wealthy and the other practically a pauper, and the owner of a jewel which in itself is fabulous wealth, yet which no Meynard would dare to sell?

"Isn't it amazing that the old woman who caused all this trouble is still a trusted servant in the house? Henri hates her beyond words. Yet in some strange way she dominates him.

"There, my child, I really have talked to you a great deal. You have a mind, and are somewhat of a Philistine like myself. But keep your thoughts to yourself, or you may become unwelcome, as I am. Don't let the strange Meynards disturb your pretty head."

I LEFT Mrs. Thompson's room with some definite knowledge concerning Pierre Meynard. He could not have gotten away from the island at that time of disaster and isolation; he could not have lived on it at liberty and escaped being seen; and he was not the type of man to accept confinement and treachery at the hands of a once loved brother—not even to shield the family name.

"Capable of beautiful sacrifice where he loved—and also devastating ugliness if pushed too far."

Poor, lovely Odollee! Whose dupe was she? Raised and educated for what purpose?

(To be Continued)

The First Book Agent

Early in the history of Rome, King Tarquinius was snatching a moment of leisure from his royal duties when a slave announced that a lady was calling on him. All unsuspecting, the King commanded that the lady be admitted. He was somewhat taken aback to see that she was elderly, carried a parcel under her arm and appeared to have something upon her mind. The lady announced that she was a Sibyl or Priestess of Apollo, and that she was in the habit of foretelling fates. On this occasion, however, she hoped to interest him in a set of books, nine in number, which she was offering at a bargain price. The king curtly replied he was not interested, and the lady departed. She was back next day, having managed to enter in some mysterious way, and offered him six of the books at the same price. She told him she had burned the other three. The king even more curtly said he was not interested. But when the persistent creature, who should be adopted as the patron of all book agents, appeared before him this time with only three books and still demanded the same price, the king gave in and signed on the dotted line. The three books were found to contain a prophetic account of the destinies of Rome, in somewhat enigmatic form. Kept in a stone chest in the Capitol, they were consulted by special readers and their oracles interpreted to the people.

Nothing Ever Happens to Angel!

by EVADNE PRICE

Alfredo the Great

The second of a series of short stories, each complete in itself.

KNOWN to being the village idiot. I admit that I've put the tin helmet on my future career of Chattelane to a country manner through my unaided efforts, but say I'm sorry to of lost Mr. Abrahams I will not.

A man what thinks the worst of a lady and hops it back to England, Home and Beauty by the first continental express without even murmuring the sailor's farewell nor giving her a dog's chance to explain what looks black but is really as pure as a new-born babe, is no man for yours truly Angel. With my kind heart and impulsive nature life with that type of gentleman would be a little bit of heaven, I don't think.

And anyway I'm one expensive gold mesh-bag studded with real emeralds to the good, which being a New Year gift I would not insult Mr. Abrahams by offering back, not if he went down on his bended knees and asked for same, so that's one ray of sunshine, the one and only at the time of going to press.

As for Gaby, she needn't sit about looking like "The Maiden's Prayer" gone wrong. I know she wouldn't of done what I done, as she will keep throwing in my teeth.

But I got a kind heart which will ever be my downfall, and you can't change God's handiwork no matter how you try. At times I wish I *was* more like the ordinary rut of people, I'd get on better.

You remember how I saved the Allerton Ruby for Mr. Hank Antony, the wealthy American, and thus doing was instrumental in procuring a rich hubby for my pal Gaby, and how I fractured my knee and how Mr. Anton sent me to the Riviera to recooperate at his expense?

Well, it was exactly New Year's Eve when Mr. and Mrs. Hank Antony, Gaby that was, arrives in Nice

accompanied by Mr. Abrahams, the opulent friend of Mr. Antony what had got more than a small crush on my maidenly charms.

I met the morning express at the Gare (French for railway station in case you're no lingwist), being well enough to get about on my leg and improving daily, and after Gaby had wept all her eyelashes off on my schoolgirl complexion, we took a motor to the finest hotel in Nice, expence being no object to Mr. Antony, as he explained.

"You two baby dolls splash the dollars," he commands lordly, "I'll fly as high as you like."

"Within reason," adds Gaby cautious, and I observed sorrowful that wealth had already warped her nature a soupsong.

"No, Hank, old feller-me-lad," broke in Mr. Abrahams at this junction, "some of the doings is on me, I got money to burn as well as you!"

Well, I warmed up considerable towards him at this reminder of his bank-balance, though I'm no gold-digger, heaven be my witness, but truth to tell I had been took back a spot by his looks department, having idealised him all these months.

His hair was thinner than I'd recollections about, and he'd the species of legs that plus fours don't improve, being distinctly gone at the knees as well as bandy. Hitherto I'd only lamped my admirer in evening togs and the dissilussionment was a staggerer.

Also his face was bunged up, but I passed that, him having had toothache on the train all night, but he'd of won no beauty competition, believe me.

"You look great, girlie," he whispers as we bowl merrily along the Promenade des Anglais, squeezing my dainty mitt nearly off its axis, "ten years younger."

"Give over, Mr. A.," I says coy, nudging him with my elbow and wishing I could with truth retort the same to him. "Are you trying to have a poor innocent lass on toast?"

"No, strait do, Angel," he declares. "You've no idea how I've looked forward to this happy re-onion. I been lonely all these months in that old manner house I bought in Darbyshire. Being a squire is all O. K. but——"

"But the boy wants a squirrel to buck things up," interrupts Mr. Antony what was listening to the love duet. We all laughed hilarious, me a bit annoyed quietly at Mr. Antony queering the auspicious occasion when the burning question of me and three square meals per day for the rest of my life was about to be settled once and for all.

But at that minute we arrived at the hotel and I forgot my irritation in the excitement of being handed to the commishioner what handed us to the booking clerk what handed us to the manager what handed us to the liftman what handed us to another menial what eventshally ushered us into the Bridal Suit reserved by cable by Mr. Antony.

My spirits was rising rapid. Here was I, Angel, ex-chorus lady out of a job, by a stroke of luck installed in a gorgious bedroom in the Bridal Suit of the best hotel in Nice overlooking the blue Mediteranean which was decorated in rose pink figured satin, a colour I've ever been partial for, and a wealthy and attractive man—bar legs—on the verge of proposing holy mattrimoney with the accent on the money, and making me independant of the whims of so-called friends for life.

I figured I could easy stop him wearing plus fours after the ceremony by a few well-chosen home truths, before then a bow leg more or less a perfect lady could ignore if tactfull.

I GAZED dreamy at the blue sea, and whether it was the Bridal Suit or whether I am physic or not I can't say, but for the first time in donkey's years I thought of Alfredo Smith, professionally known to all, including the crowned heads of Europe, as Alfredo, The Great Music-Maker, the only man I've ever really loved in my life although he treated me so dirty.

I would be Mrs. Alfredo now if he hadn't hopped it the night before the ceremony leaving me with nothing but sad memories and a white satin dress on my hands that only by a fluke I was able to use on tour the following autumn in "His Lowly Bride" before tight skirts went out. For months after I couldn't bear no music without having to be give brandy.

He was a miracle with music, was Alfredo, including bells and other musical instraments from a tin whistle to a big drum. I used to dance a kind of hula-hula dance in a grass skirt to Alfredo's guitar accompanying, which was why we was thrown together in the beginning.

We done a lot of seaside dates with that show, and I expect it was Nice looking so like Brighton what brought back the past. Bar the palms of course.

"I wonder whats became of Alfredo Smith?" I says to Gaby what come in to be hooked up just then, thinking how fat she was getting with good living, although I kept silent on the subject.

"Gawd's truth," she ejackulates, forgetting she's Mrs. Hank and an aristocrat instead of the leader of the back row as once upon a time, "you give me quite a turn, Angel. Fancy remembering that washout."

"I was batty about Alfredo," I whispers husky, "silly I was."

"You was," her voice was sharp. "Pull your socks up and stop being a sloppy Liz. Where's your pride after the low way he treat you? Mr. A—"

"I know, Gaby, and I intend to swoon on Mr. A's neck the minute I get the chance, without any coy this-is-so-sudden business, either, bandy legs and all."

"Bandy? A man's bandy legs is nothing but a graceful curve when he can sign big cheques like Mr. A can, Angel. You ought to of grasped that fact at your time of life," says she.

"Alfredo's legs was like a greek god," I remarks sentimental, ignoring the remark re my years of discretion.

"You never seen a greek god," she retorts icy. "Pull yourself together. Better to be wed to a wealthy pair of bandy legs, my girl, than slaving your fingers to the bone to keep the crease in a greek god's Sunday trousers."

I sighed, glancing in the mirror to see if my new lipsalve wasn't a bit too fierce even for Nice but decided not. I didn't know what had got me by the ears to-day, but I felt all doodah and with a yearn for Romance. I told Gaby I thought it was the climate.

"Second childhood, you mean," she says sarcastic. "Cut out this Alfredo stuff. The boys is waiting to feed us lunch at that open-air restaurant with the striped umbrellas over the tables."

WELL, the mention of food drove Alfredo's figure out of my mind prow tem, and I bucked up considerable when I seen that Mr. Abrahams had changed into white flannels and a yachting cap with a gold anchor on the peak.

A gentleman to his patent leather boots with the fawn tops he looked, as did Mr. Antony what had donned a blue serge trimmed with fancy brass buttons, and with Gaby in cerise foolard and me in apple green many eyes followed us as we strolled along, the picture of affluents

Gay we all was, the only jarring thing being when Mr. A remarked chatty that either I had lost flesh or Gaby had put it on, I looked that slender against her. It took a promise of a diamond ring and four cocktails to calm her down and stop her giving him the bird, but after that I exuded charm on him, as you can imagine. It takes a man of the world to know how to pay a delicate compliment, say what you may.

It was great shakes sitting there in the sun, I can tell you. It's a good job Fate don't give us no inkling of what's in store for us.

When I think how Mr. A kidded me tender about breaking the camera when the photo gent took our pictures, his arm thrown careless and loving round my neck and me smiling like Gladys Cooper in convulsions, and the carefree way I lolled back smoking Mr. A's cigarettes while he ordered the best fizz on the wine-list to the waiter's open pleasure, and my girlish happiness when he drew a parcel from his pocket and threw it in my lap with a "There's the most expensive gold mesh bag I could buy in Bond Street, Angel. I don't care what I spend on a girl when I like her. Hang the expence. Note the emeralds it's studded with, girlie, real! No imitations for Mr. Abrahams, thanks"—I say, when I think of all that I could simply pass out through a gap in a hedge, teeth in hand, and ears flapping with sorrow. You can't never tell. We're blind toys of a relentless Fate, as I used to remark in "Was She To Blame?" Not that I blame a living soul except my generous heart.

It was a lovely bag, the biggest I ever seen and must of cost a pretty penny, which I hinted delicate to Mr. A. It's nice to know the price of a gift if possible, in case of popping later should poverty oblige one, but my admirer ignored my playful hint, so I confines myself to several spots of gushing and beaming to encourage his generous instincts, and I must say it went down well, his ardour only being quelled by the waiter's timely arrival with the menu.

While our cavaleers was engrossed in ordering, Gaby and me amused ourselves by a little sub rosa argument on the side as to what said gift was really worth in cold cash, during which I looks up and notices the three musicians in Italian costume draping themselves artistic in the middle of the road preparing to do their worst on a couple of mandolins and a moth-eaten guitar, a little thin man, a bit fat fellow and an ordinary sized tall one with his back to me.

"Ah," says Mr. Antony genial, "a bit of jazz to cheer things. Just what the doc ordered to tone my system."

"They look as though a good meal would tone *their* system," breaks in Mr. A. "The tall one wouldn't be bad-looking if he wasn't so half-starved."

WELL, the mention of a good-looker being my special weakness and ever will, I sits up and takes notice. Then I give a gasp which, me drinking at the moment, no one took no special notice of. I couldn't believe my starry optics, so I took another view.

Yes, my eyes hadn't deceived me—standing before me in the center of the Promenade Des Anglais, tuning up his instrument, stood my long-lost Alfredo, disguised as an Italian in a couple of yards of dirty red and green creton.

Well, you could of knocked me down with a feather if you'd been so disposed, the shock was so uncalled-for. Alfredo, what I hadn't heard of for twelve years, but what I'd just been thinking of not half an hour back. Talk about mental telegraphy, it was marvellous for him to do the Prodigal Son act like this.

I glanced sideways at Gaby, but she was busy in arguing whether sole Mornay or plain grilled was to cheer our interiors and hadn't seen what I had, so I moved my chair and shut out her view, while I puzzled what to do and took another drop of good old bubbly to jazz up my think-box, it feeling like soggy cotton-wool at the moment.

One thing was certain, Gaby must not see Alfredo.

Not that I intended from the beginning to see him myself after we'd finished lunch, I swear that here and now. My main object in concealing his presence from her was *not* so as I could meet him clandistine and renew the old affair, she can accuse me all she likes. I wanted to save Gaby from her theatrical past rising and slapping her one in the jaw, so to speak.

A nice thing it would have been for an aristocrat like Mr. Antony to of had his wife claimed in public as an old acquaintance by a low street musician, and in spite of her three chins and all her diamonds, Gaby was still the old Gaby of Alfredo's time what he hated like poison, and knowing him like I did I guessed he would of welcomed the chance to get a bit of his own back for all the juicy epaulets she'd called him in the dear dead days beyond recall.

But it's no use arguing with Gaby, her having no powers of deduction and not being able to see an inch past her water-blacked eyelashes.

So, determined to save my pal at all costs and for no ulterior motive I glanced furtive at Alfredo when no one was noticing.

Lordy, he looked up against it. His trousers was frayed at the hems and his boots was holes joined together by bits of leather and string, and he looked as though he'd overdone the Antipon treatment by a couple of centuries. I *was* sorry for him.

Gaby says I ought to of felt, ah, this is where *I* score, but as I remarked previous, I got a kind heart, which may be more than coronets but is a sight less paying like most things poets drivel on about, poor mutts, not knowing the world like I do through bitter experience.

Well, as I attacked my second help of sole my heart begun to beat wild, for Alfredo struck up the very tune I used to dance to in my grass costume, a tune he composed himself, and which he'd christened "The Angel Hula Dance" after me.

This has torn it, thinks I, Gaby's sure to wise up to this melody, but no, she's too busy feeding her face to bother about mere music. Although she's my pal I will say that Gaby never had no soul for anything but food and jewels.

The musicians had collected twice already, first the little man had brung the hat round, and then the fat one had followed suit, and next time it would be Alfredo's turn and that would rip it good and proper.

Then just as I had give up all hope my brain functioned and the big idea come to me. I leans over coy and looks passionate into Mr. A's swelled out face.

"Mr. A," I purrs, "will you do something to please little Angel?"

He nods affirmingly, his mouth full of sole and it being bad manners to converse in that condition.

"Then," continues Delilah's understudy, "will nice Mr. A lend little Angel a pound note?"

"Two if you like, Angel," he answers gallant, "when you smile like that," and inwardly kicking myself for not making it two, which with my experience I ought to of known better, I digs my claws into the Fisher and rose.

"Watch little Angel do her good deed for the day," I gurgles girlish, and before they had got my intention

I had run out into the road and pressed the quidlet into Alfredo's willing hand.

"Turn your back," I orders in a whisper, "don't let Gaby see you, clear off at once and ring me up at three and I'll explain," and I tells him our hotel.

He looks as though he'll fall through the earth with surprise, but he has the presents of mind to do as I bid while I run back to our party.

"Angel," says Mr. Antony pleased as Punch, "if you haven't the kind heart, kiddo!"

Gaby suspecting me, joins dutiful in the chorus, but Mr. Abrahams don't look so delighted, it being his wealth I'd played Mrs. Rockefeller with. Not that I cared.

I'd saved Gaby which was all that mattered, though she calls me a liar to my face when I say so. I nearly sang as Alfredo & Co. faded into the distance, and I decided there and then I was going dead off Mr. A rapid.

He'd taken his hat off and the scented summer breeze was toying with his locks and showing the bald patch, and only by gazing hard at the emerald studded mesh-bag was I able to thank him pretty for helping me to be a good girl scout, but the peach melba had come and gone before he responded and stopped registering If Winter Comes.

Then, just as we had decided to motor to Monte Carlo and back, Mr. A's toothache returns and he decides to go to a dentist.

"I must be O. K. for the New Year Ball at the Casino to-night," he mumbles through his pain and we agree praps he's right.

So when I decided to sleep my lunch off Gaby said she would too. I *was* relieved. I wanted to get back in case Alfredo phoned, besides I wanted to be alone to think. It had been a bit of a shock.

I sighed gentle as I got up to depart. As far as the naked eye could see Alfredo's figure was unimpared after all these years. I wondered if he thought I'd changed.

"I'd give something to know," I thought, but I never guessed how much I'd have to give.

And I hadn't been back in my room ten minutes before the phone rung.

I AM used to being misconstrued, but I will maintain with dying breath that I did *not* go and meet Alfredo at that common little café in the back street through any sentimental reason. I went because he'd of called at our swell hotel if I'd of refused, and then Gaby would of had something to moan about.

I admit as he took me by both hands and whispered "Angy" I felt like passing away, until I thought of me waiting in vain at the registry that day long ago, and all my pals pitying me for a prize piecan.

"Miss to you, Mr. Smith," I chides dignified, and the Great Alfredo wilts a spot or two.

"Forgive me," he begs, "but if you knew all you would forgive all," which having a good memory I recognised instant as a speech from the play we was in together, although I didn't let on. I listens attentive, though, while he recites the rest of his piece and tells me why he don't show up that fatal morn.

Alfredo always had the most honest blue eyes in the world that could pull the village blacksmith stunt on you when he was lying like forty first-class troopers in full action, and he looked me fair and square between the eyebrows now as he unfolded his tale.

"I was married all the time, Angy," he pleads, "but I thought she was dead, honest, and when she turned up the night before you and me was to

a been tied up I didn't dare to tell you, you being such a virrago when annoyed, so I hopped it. I still love you, though you'd never look at me now, I know, you being married to that fellow with the patent leather boots, and being dressed like a duchess."

I intimated cold that I was still unmarried though about to be with luck, but I felt myself growing more soft towards him, especially as he informed me that his wife's telegraphic address had been "Cemetery" now for ten years.

"You're come down being a low street musician," I remarks.

"I been ill," says Alfredo gloomy. "I come to Nice and took ill. I been better a month now, and I got a Hawaiian orchestra and we been rehearsing ready to open at a cafe to-night at good money on a long contract, but at the last minute I got another stroke of rotten luck. My dancing lady's down with flu and there isn't no time to rehearse another, and the cafe won't have us without the lady, it's no attraction. Not that she could ever shake a hip like you, Angy, you was some hula dancer, you was."

Well, I'm only human and I must say I felt flattered.

"Cut out the soft stuff," I murmurs. But he repeats firm:

"I don't care who hears me say it, there never was and never will be a hula girl to touch you, Angy, nor with your lovely figure, neither, which, judging what I can see of it which with present modes is a good portion, is as beautiful as it ever was. And now tick me off if you like, but I must be truthful."

Naturally I hadn't the heart to hand him the bird after that, and neither would Gaby if she'd had it said to her, in spite of her sneers.

So we sat talking friendly of old times and suddenly Alfredo says "Angy, why not come and dance for me to-night? Don't the lure of the footlights never tug at your heart?"

"No," I says firm, "they don't. Besides even if I was so disposed I couldn't. I'm going to the Midnight Ball at the Casino with Gaby and Mr. Antony and my fiance which given half a chance he will be by then."

"And old pals can starve for the sake of a helping hand," he says bitter, "old pals what have never ceased loving you. I don't think *you* was hard like that gold-digger Gaby what thinks of nothing but Number 1."

"You leave Gaby be," I flares up, "you never liked her because she seen through you which I never done, Alfredo Smith, being a fool and loving you not wise but too well," and I breaks down and sobs, overcome by emoshion.

The next minute I was in his arms and he was kissing me the cafe being empty.

"I love you still, Angy," he declares, "and if you say the word I'll marry you as soon as I can raise the licence money. Say you love me a little piece, Angy."

WELL, being a weak fool I throws discretion to the wind and intimates that I've not changed my affections, and eventshally he persuades me to say I'll dance the hula for him in his show to-night.

He plans it all out. It's dead easy for me, I'm to draw the curtains of the Bridal Suit and powder my face dead white and swear blue blind to Gaby that I've got a headache and must miss dinner and they go on to the Casina and I'll join them for supper after I've taken a double aspirin and had a sleep.

Then I'm to slip out, go to the cafe where Alfredo's waiting, get into my make-up, which is a native girl brown all over with a black wig, do my hula dance for Alfredo, get back to the ho-

tel, bath the brown stuff off, change into my evening frock and get to the Casino, no one being any the wiser.

Tomorrow the doctor says Alfredo's dancer will be better from the flu and all will be well, his fortunes is saved and he can start a future career and we will be wed as soon as he has saved enough.

So he phones the manager of the cafe and tells him the show can open after all and I slips back to the Bridal Suit, and when Gaby comes to call me for dinner, I just groans and whispers as per schedule that I'm too ill to stir. Needless to say she's mad as a tiger with earache at me for mucking up the New Year do, but I just groan and finally she relents.

I did feel a hypockrit when she leant over and kissed me and rang for aspirin and wanted to fetch a doctor, an cetra, and I wavered between love and duty several times, but love won, me being kind-hearted, and she departed to dress, and when she crept in after I pretended to be fast in the arms of Morphia, so she scrawled a note which I read as soon as she'd gone.

It was to say that they'd all three gone out to dine and she had give orders that I was to sleep undisturbed till eleven-thirty, when a menial would help me dress quick, and Mr. A would call with a taxi and take me to the Casino, and she hoped I'd give him a chance to get on with the doings and propose H. M. and be done with it, his tooth being out and him in a good mood.

"P.S.," she adds, "think of that country manner like a real Angel."

Poor old Gaby. I wept as I thought of all she'd say when I refused Mr. A and eloped with Alfredo after all these weary years of unrequited. I reckoned she'd turn majenta with rage and I wasn't far wrong re the majenta, as things turned out.

ALFREDO was waiting for me at the back door of the cafe and greeted me loving. I got a bit of a shock when I seen the size of the cafe, somehow I'd thought of it as a little out-of-the-way place, but this was a big fashionable one, and the dressing room was filled with ladies, and I found we was only one turn of many, being New Year's Eve and a special cabaret show.

I felt worried I'd come, but it was too late to turn back, so I undressed and started to make up, and as I slapped the greasepaint on, the lure of the footlights got me good and proper and I felt this was my life and nothing else would satisfy me, not even Mr. A's money and the country manner.

I must say I looked lovely in the grass dress and the bead bodice, but as I gazed suspicious at the collection of she-males sharing my dressing-room I decided that to leave my gold mesh bag studded with real emeralds among *that* lot would be sheer insanity, and as there was no place in my hula costume to hide same, it being hardly sufficient to hide me let alone a gold mesh bag, I fastened it secure with a large safety pin to my skirt, where, though not Hawaiian looking, it proved I had money and was not a poverty-struck artist like the others.

Then our turn come near, and I followed Alfredo to the side of the stage, or where the stage ought to of been. I've never did any cabaret work in my career, and when they explained to me that I was intended to dance my hula-hula in and out among the tables, I refused point-blank to go on, I was that nervous, but after Alfredo persuaded me a while and called me "Honey" and other endeering terms, I give in, he looked so worried.

That's the drawback of a kind

heart, you can't see people looking heartbroke if it's in your power to do them a good turn.

And all of a sudden I had a nasty feeling of disaster, I must be physic. I was just about to pretend to faint and end the argument that way when the music struck up and automatic I took up my cue and made my star entrance.

In and out of the tables I wiggled and swished my grass dress, and I must say the hula had never gone so well. They stamped and hollowed for more, being a bit muzzed and holidayish, so I took my encore and still they shouted for a repeat.

The manager came rushing round the back. "Encore," he says delighted, "encore."

I must say the applause had gone to my head a bit by then, and I was just coming in gay for the third spasm when who should I glimp sitting down at the only empty table in the room but Mr. A, Gaby and hubby, what had just arrived. I turned to fly, but the manager pushed me on again and nearly dying I started a feeble hula, all the pep gone out of me in a flash.

Then common sense came to my rescue, in the brown make-up and that black wig it was a hundred to one against them recognizing me, specially with me in bed with a headache. So I kept as far from their table as I could, praying for Alfredo to cut it short.

Then all of a sudden I could see Mr. A's eye fixed on me, and he jumped up excited and said something to Mr. Antony what passed it on to Gaby, what started violent.

They was staring at the gold mesh bag studded with emeralds hanging on my waist, which I'd forgot!

Then Mr. A. rose and grabbed hold of the manager standing nearby and shouted a command. How I got off I never knew, but the manager, Mr. A and Mr. Antony followed me excited into the artists' waiting room, and the next thing I knew was I was accused of pinching the gold mesh bag studded with emeralds, and Mr. A was ordering the manager to send for a policeman, which not speaking English he couldn't understand, which was my salvation.

They hadn't recognized me and I daresent say a word in my defence, and I looked round in vain for the missing Alfredo to protect his future bride. Then I seen Gaby coming through the pass door and my speech returned.

"Gaby," I calls piteous, "it's me, Angel," and I faints in real earnest, or as near as don't matter.

SO HERE I am in disgrace, Mr. A having hopped it to England and Gaby only addressing me to revile and persecute.

Alfredo? Ah, that's where you got me on the raw. That Don Jewan was married all the time to the hula dancer what had gone down with flu. I got his note next day asking me to forgive his deception.

All I ask is to see him for five minutes, but Gaby nearly goes dippy when I suggest it, so I suppress my womanly instincts and let my nails grow in case Fate is kind.

Yes, I admit I've mucked my future as Chattelane to a country manner, but say I'm sorry to of lost Mr. Abrahams I will not, not if you was to crown me with one of them coronets which is alleged second in importance to a kind heart. I couldn't of been faithful to them bandy legs, never.

Anyway, I'm one gold mesh-bag studded with emeralds to the good, which is better than a smack in the eye, as Shakespear says.

Crooked Waters

By WILLIAM MERRIAM ROUSE

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

The calm heights of the Adirondacks look down on this drama of romance and action as it unfolds itself by the waters of Lake Champlain.

With quiet intensity William Merriam Rouse builds up his story of love and vengeance to a thrilling and inevitable climax which is sure to make you catch your breath.

CHAPTER I

FLEECED

THE uniform of Captain John Becket was frayed and stained and there was a shrapnel tear across the ribs. But he walked lower Broadway whistling, with his chin up, and even the wounded leg hitting hard on the sidewalks of New York. Never mind uniforms!

He had worn out a lot of them in two services and three years of the war. For he had been one of the lone madmen to go into it before the United States had been stirred with more than a sentimental interest.

Now he was home to the enjoyment of what must be a snug little fortune according to his reckoning. When he left he had owned a half-interest in timber-lands of large but unknown potential value in the United States and Canada.

Becket had left a competent if somewhat rough partner to take care of both of their interests. Of course, Barker had called him a fool for going to war, but this had not mattered. Almost everybody else had called him a fool. He had wanted to go; that was all.

That the letters from Barker had stopped did not mean much; overseas mail was a joke in those days. So Becket was not worried as he swung into an elevator and mentioned his floor, with a grin for the strange elevator boy.

This was a great day—he wanted to grin at everybody. Along a ring-

ing corridor and around the corner he went. . . . Then he stopped.

Something was wrong here. Becket felt as he had at the boom of his first aeroplane bomb. The sign on the door said "The Raleigh & Crane Implement Co." Yet this was the number of his suite.

Becket turned, bewildered, and found a familiar name on the opposite side of the corridor. He snapped open the door, swept past an astonished office boy, and found himself looking down into the dazed eyes of Emory Mercer, president of the company and his friend.

"You . . . John . . ." The tongue of the older man stumbled.

"Yes, Mr. Mercer, back home and all that!" exclaimed Becket in a brittle voice as he shook hands with his friend.

"But where's my business . . . what . . . where's Barker! What's happened?"

Emory looked out of the window and through the top of the skyscraper forest. He looked as men do when they seek a path away from the truth they must tell a friend. Then he swung his big chair around again and faced Captain Becket.

"You've been fleeced, John," he said, in a low voice, "and none of your friends knew it in time to do anything. You gave Barker a full power of attorney, didn't you?"

"Yes," admitted Becket thickly.

"Well! Too much of a soldier and too little of a business man, perhaps. John, he used it! Not all men keep faith, it seems, my son. Not in this day.

Barker cleaned you out and he's gone, disappeared! He may be in Rio, spending it, or Buenos Aires. God knows! I'm sorry. If I can do anything . . . money . . . my home . . ."

But Captain Becket was standing strictly at attention with his rugged face sickly under the weathering. His gaze struck hard against the wall; his hands slowly became fists.

Then Mercer heard him say, almost inaudibly:

"I'll find him . . . I know the man . . . his history . . . and I think I know where to look! Thanks, Mercer!"

CHAPTER II

THE GIRL

THE little, land-locked cove had maintained its unruffled beauty since Samuel de Champlain gave those waters his name. Outside the cove the lake stretched away in pale blue loveliness toward Canada.

Within the hidden entrance, just wide enough for a small sloop to pass comfortably, tiny waves lap-lapped on sand and pebbles. In here the winds did not blow, for up from that oval shore a wooded ridge lifted itself a hundred feet toward the sky.

The bright young green of newly matured leaves shimmered in the sunlight; oaks and maples and birches screened the ridge down to the primeval boulders tossed along the beach.

In this charming setting, concealed by one of the lumps of Archaean granite, a man squatted like a toad in a pansy bed. Except that his flannel shirt was blue instead of brown he bore a considerable resemblance to a toad, sitting upon his powerful thighs and watching unblinkingly the entrance to the cove.

The sleeve of his shirt had been cut away almost to the shoulder, and the arm that reached out to balance him against the rock was corded and ridged with such lumps and bands of muscle that it seemed more like the arm of a mythological figure, done in marble, than the flesh of a living man.

The arm was of the whiteness of marble, also; and the strange contrasts of the man extended even to his hand. Strong, curving fingers were set against the rock, and they were surprisingly well cared for to be the fingers of one who wore much abused corduroys and a jagged-sleeved shirt.

The man's face was seamed and rugged like the country of the Adirondacks, with two mountain lakes for eyes. A thatch of dark hair, touched with gray, was pushed back from a broad forehead; a beard half hid his face. It was not these things, however, that made him look like a giant toad. But over one shoulder the blue shirt was lifted by a hump that threw him all out of drawing and twisted his bull-like neck awry.

THIS was John Buller, better known as Johnny Bull wherever his sloop had touched along the shores of Lake Champlain.

Whether he was up in the broken Canadian waters, on the York state side, or under the rolling hills of Vermont, he was Johnny Bull to those persons of uncertain character with whom he had dealings.

This, not because of English blood, but by reason of the headlong rush with which he charged upon danger whenever it came flaunting over his horizon.

He liked equally the shock of battle with a crashing November gale, or with still more dangerous men.

The *Elena* was due to come in at any time now, back to this cove which was the nearest thing to a home that she knew. Much earlier in the day Johnny had sent her over to the Vermont shore to stock up with canned goods for a trip north. Frank Pecor, the mate, had taken the sloop and one man, Crazy Bill Stevens, to help work her.

So Johnny Bull watched, not wholly without anxiety, for the graceful mainsail of his boat to come swelling through that opening in the shore line, which was so plain from within and so hard to pick up from the broad lake.

A tremor ran along the motionless arm, and a flicker disturbed the clear depths of Johnny Bull's eyes. But not even a muttered exclamation came from his lips when, instead of the *Elena*, a smart-looking canoe shot into the cove and glided noiselessly on with diminishing speed.

He merely continued to watch, shifting his gaze from the mouth of the little harbor to the small craft which was so unwelcome there.

Worse, a girl was paddling the canoe. And still worse, she was not a native.

At least the chances were ten to one that she was an outlander. The air of surprise with which she threw back her dark head and drank in the still beauty of the shore was enough to mark her as a stranger.

Her hair was long, Johnny Bull noted, and massed about her face. He set that impression in his memory, as well as the glimmer of silk sport shirt against the brilliance of a pile of cushions. He was certain this girl would come to the cove again, by the enjoyment with which she rested her paddle across the gunwales and gazed about. And it was necessary to find out who she was.

IN ANOTHER moment Johnny Bull did allow himself to growl. The *Elena*! Tip of a slender mast, and then the white-winged sloop shooting into calm waters. She came up into what little breeze there was and the mainsail flapped down.

The jib dropped, the anchor went overboard, and then the tall and graceful Pecor suddenly stopped

work, with a halyard dangling in his fingers.

He had caught sight of the girl in the canoe.

Slowly Pector turned and swept the shore line with his gaze. Twice over, and then Johnny Bull knew that the mate had not seen him. For Pector drew the dinghy alongside, leaped in and cast off.

He headed straight for the canoe. Up to now the girl had been calmly watching the sloop, apparently with no thought of danger. It was not until Pecor was so near that she had no chance to get out of the cove that she became alarmed.

Her paddle dug into the water, and she put her shoulders to it, but already the laughing mate had the bow of the canoe in his hand. Dinghy and canoe went back to the *Elena*.

"Now's a good time to let that bird know who's in command!"

Johnny Bull muttered the words to himself as he slipped down to the water at a moment when Pecor's back was turned, and went in. He swam most of the distance to the sloop under water.

Johnny came up under the stern, caught the swinging rudder, and lifted himself until he could get a grip on the coaming that ran around the edge of the deck.

His mighty arms, gleaming and dripping, pulled him up until he could peer under the shining brass rail above the coaming.

There he rested for a moment, with a leg hooked over the rudder to help support his weight.

The girl was on deck, backed up against the boom. Now Johnny Bull saw her face plainly, and as he looked the firm lines about his mouth deepened and became grim.

She was one of those girls who, at their mere passing by, make men feel better. Not that there was the least hint of primness in that pale face, which would have been piquant but for the fright that now mastered it.

There were eyes of such soothing gray under a low white forehead, and such transparency of delicate skin, that no man could look at her and not regret at least some of his sins.

The gray eyes had darkened and her full lips were touched with a waxen look, for Frank Pecor was standing undesirably close. He put his hands on his hips, with a hint of a swagger, and sent a laugh ringing through the silence of the cove.

"I don't understand how you dared make me come on board this boat!" she exclaimed, in a low voice.

Her fingers clutched the folds of the mainsail. "You don't know who I am——"

"I know!" Pecor brushed up the brown curls which had earned him the nickname of "Handsome Frank." An off-color diamond flashed on one finger.

"You're Mary Gray. Your old man, Delano Gray, has got a big summer place on Little Brother Island."

"If you . . . if anything should happen to me he'd have you . . . hunted down!"

"Girlie," said Frank, and he gave a hitch to a belt with a monogramed silver buckle, "you're miles from home, and in a canoe. Anything can happen to a girl in a canoe, miles away from home! Likely enough we'll get a squall this afternoon!"

Now she understood the intense reality of her danger. She went as white as the *Elena's* spotless sail and Johnny Bull saw that she was trembling.

"Money," she began in a hushed voice, "if money . . ."

"I make lots of it."

Pecor towered above her, even

though she was tall for a woman, and enjoyed his power.

"And it's a long time since I seen a cutie that looked as good to me as you do! I spotted you in Valeboro last week, but I didn't think I'd draw no luck like this!"

Johnny Bull shifted his position and slowly began to draw himself up.

The girl saw him first, and she became horror-stricken at this new apparition rising from the waters of the lake. Her eyes closed; her lips moved silently.

Then Pecor felt the presence of another and turned. Instantly he jerked into a position of defense and his hand dived into a pocket. He threw away the sheath of the knife that he drew.

CHAPTER III

ABOARD THE ELENA

JOHNNY went over the low rail as easily as a cat leaps from floor to window sill. He dropped to the deck, shook himself, and crouched with his humped shoulder raised. With a soft-footed movement he began to go forward along the deck.

"I guess I might as well finish you now, Pecor," he said, in a quiet, almost sad voice. "You've made me sick for a good while, but I've been kind-hearted.

Fear welled into the mottled brown eyes of the mate. He took a step backward; then another, and another.

Down the narrow strip of deck to starboard of the house Johnny followed him. The knife twitched in the grimy hand.

"You can't make up your mind whether you want to throw it, or save it for close work, can you?" asked Johnny mockingly.

"Either way is all right with me, Frank! You won't live long, anyway!"

"Damn you!" shrieked Pecor.

Like a shadow Johnny slipped away from the whizzing blade. He heard a splash as the knife hit the water, and permitted a grin to twist his lips. But he neither increased nor diminished the speed with which he advanced upon the retreating mate.

Suddenly Pecor turned to dive overboard. Johnny Bull was upon him with a spring so quick that his feet did not have a chance to leave the deck before he was crushed down and crumpled up, as though his big frame had been covered with putty instead of sound muscles.

He yelled and tried to bite; tried to get a thumb into the eye of Johnny Bull. Johnny brushed away the desperate arms and settled himself upon Pecor; pressed knees upon those arms and sank his fingers into the throat of his helpless enemy.

It was at this moment that Johnny Bull became conscious of interference. Slim fingers seized his wrists. He stared down, astonished, at little nails pressed white in their futile effort to break his hold. Then he met the gray eyes of the girl.

"You've killed him!" she panted. "For God's sake, don't."

Johnny eased his grip a little and smiled calmly into her face.

"Oh, don't you want me to kill him?"

"Of course not! You . . . you monster!"

The horror within her broke cover; it came leaping out in voice and eyes. Johnny Bull laughed and got up, jerking Pecor to his feet. He held him at arm's length, by the throat.

"He's guilty of everything," said Johnny. "He's tried to sell me out, to kill me, and he'll do it again if I let him go. He'd have killed you,

very likely. And you want to let him go! Girl, you're a fool!"

He flung Pecor against the mast, and the mate hung there gripping the halyards. The fear of death passed from his face, and in its place came a stealthy hatred.

"Where's Crazy Bill?" asked Johnny. "Drunk?"

"Y-yes!" choked Pecor." He passed out . . . I put him below."

"A fine crew I've got!"

Johnny shrugged and turned to Mary Gray.

"Get into your canoe, please. I'm going to take you ashore before the others come back from Valeboro."

"But I don't want to go ashore with you!"

She blanched and drew away from him.

"I want to go home——"

"You've got to go ashore," he told her, "but you needn't be afraid of me."

WHETHER he had reassured her or not he did not know, but when he drew the canoe alongside she stepped in. His noiseless, powerful strokes of the paddle drove them rapidly to the beach.

There she leaped out and away from him; and his smile was bitter as he met her eyes. His mighty fingers closed to fists.

"I understand," he said in a low voice, "but I'm not going to touch you. I didn't save you from Pecor for myself!"

"What is it that you want?"

Her eyes swung to his humped shoulder, and softened with pity.

"Do you know who I am?" he asked.

"I know now," she replied hesitatingly. "I think that . . . you're Johnny Bull, the bootlegger!"

"Yes."

"But . . . your accent . . . you must be an educated man! A gentleman . . . in everything except . . ."

"Except my looks!" he laughed. "It's of no importance, anyhow. I wanted to say a few words out of hearing of Pecor."

"Do you think you can forget all about what's happened, and this cove, and the sloop?"

"Oh . . . I won't make any trouble!"

"More than that! You must not talk! It's convenient for me to use this cove. You're the first person who's wandered in here in a long time. And I don't want officers coming here, or hijackers."

"Suppose I won't promise not to talk?"

"You're free to go home right now," he said coldly.

"I'm sorry!" She flushed. "I will promise! I'll say nothing, even to my father. But you . . . aren't you afraid of that man on the sloop?"

"Afraid?"

Johnny Bull barked something like a laugh.

"All men are afraid! But I take danger by the throat, as I did Pecor!"

"But he might kill you!"

"He can't, because I don't care whether he does or not!"

"You don't care?" She looked at him with speculative eyes, more at ease now. "I wonder if it's because . . ."

"Because of my hump?" he finished for her, as her glance touched his shoulder. "No!"

Her cheeks blazed; a small hand raised and dropped again helplessly.

"It seems a shame that a man like you should be doing . . . *this!*"

"Why not?"

He was staring hungrily at the contours of her chin; at the lovely line of her neck as it curved to meet her shoulder.

"In spite of what you saw today, I haven't killed anybody."

"Of course it's none of my business."

"Of course not!"

Her eyes darkened at that; but there was pain mingled with the sudden anger.

"I'm going! And I'm grateful. and some time I may be able to do something for you!"

"No one will ever be able to do anything for me," he told her gravely. "People have to do things for themselves!"

"You're a sick man!" she exclaimed, as she stepped into the canoe and made ready to shove off.

"Do I look sick, Miss Gray?"

He laughed that hard bark which came so readily to him and raised an arm in the sunlight. The muscles rippled and grew into outstanding billows under the clear skin.

"It's your soul that's sick!"

She dipped her paddle, backed, and turned with a twist of the blade.

"I haven't got one!" he flung after her.

She was going away, round arms flashing and black head bent. Johnny Bull stood motionless and watched her until suddenly the canoe shot out of the cove and was lost to view.

CHAPTER IV

MUTINY

THE cabin of the *Elena* was thick with tobacco smoke and the odor of whisky. Her crew lay in narrow bunks and lounged on lockers, swinging with the gentle movement of the boat, which was still at anchor in the cove.

Through the drifting smoke the men watched the big form of their captain, Johnny Bull, fill the doorway, and his eyes were as cold as Lake Champlain waters when winter is about to set them in blue ice.

Pecor sat insolently upon a locker, head thrown back so that the purple markings on the brown of his throat showed for all men to read.

Crazy Bill had come sufficiently out of his jag to blink a partial understanding of what was going on. He fumbled with a pipe and growled to himself.

In another bunk the beefy, potbellied Ommidy Bombard rested on one elbow and looked with fat encased eyes from the face of Pecor to the craggy countenance of the captain.

Tiptoe Sullivan, long framed and hanging of head, shot cunning glances from time to time at Handsome Frank, as though he were waiting for a signal.

Short-tail Joe Riley applied himself to a bottle at intervals, but without visible effect. He also had an air of waiting; and so did the broad-shouldered Stubby Holcomb, sitting block-like as he twiddled his thumbs, with no hint that emotion could ever show upon his flat face.

"That's the way it is," said Pecor. after an interval of silence broken only by a cough here, a grunt there. "The boys ain't satisfied. What you going to do about it, Johnny?"

Johnny Bull shifted his weight from one foot to the other; he had been thinking hard and fast. His men were all here, and apparently all in this rebellion.

It could never have happened but for Pecor. Whatever their discontent, they would have had no leader. But the harm was done and now the elimination of Pecor would not destroy the spirit of mutiny.

Another would take up the cause, having been shown the way. Either Johnny must crush the spirit itself, or lose.

"IT COMES down to this," said Johnny slowly, after he had made

up his mind as to what he was going to do, "you fellows want me to cut my liquor and double the money.

"You want me to bring in dope. And you want to stick up Benny Gunboat's trucks over on the Poke o' Moonshine road because he's cutting prices on us.

"You want things as they were before I came . . . when Pecor was running a truck . . . before I bought the boat . . . and made him bring his gang in with me?"

"Dat's business!" grunted Ommidy Bombard.

"We can clean up a hundred times what we do now," put in Handsome Frank. "You ain't going to last forever at this game, Johnny! You didn't dare go over to Vermont today to get supplies. You got to make it fast to beat this game!"

"That's what you all think, is it?" asked Johnny Bull, looking around the cabin.

"We're all right the way we be!" announced Crazy Bill, with thick belligerence.

"It ain't moral to water licker!"

"Shut up, you rummy!" bawled Riley, as he took another drink. "Frank is telling him what we want!"

"Just so!" Johnny Bull grinned, with half-closed eyes.

"And now I'll tell Pecor, and all of you, what I'm going to do! I'm not going to sell water, and I'm not going to run dope!

"I'm a law-breaker, and a hard ticket, and sooner or later I expect to get plugged with a soft-nose bullet, but while I sail the *Elena* she'll carry what I say!"

"If you boys don't like it now's a good time to go ashore. The sloop's going north at dark, and I'd just as soon take her alone!"

DURING the next few moments only the sound of hard breathing broke the stillness in the cabin. Upon one after another of those tensely waiting men Johnny Bull turned the slits which were his eyes, and one after another they shifted and turned their glances toward Pecor. The mate had become bold, backed by the crew. He stared insolently at Johnny.

"Maybe you'll be the one to go ashore!" he said at last.

A trick somewhere; the back of the mind of Johnny Bull had been alert for a trick ever since the beginning of this interview and it was well for him that the back of his mind stood guard.

He did not believe in the reality of this defiance from Pecor; the mate was not the man to stand up to him. Therefore, instead of watching Pecor, Johnny let his glance play over the faces of the others, searching for a hint of threatening movement.

It was Tiptoe Sullivan who had been detailed to do the job. Johnny Bull caught the movement of shoulder and arm as soon as it began, and when the ugly muzzle of an automatic pistol appeared he was already doing something about it.

Shirt-tail Joe Riley sat nearest to the captain of the *Elena*. At the first movement from Sullivan, Johnny had reached for him. With a grip on shoulder and belt he swung Joe up as a shield; and then heaved him upon Tiptoe Sullivan and the pistol.

Riley and Sullivan became a tangle of legs and arms and curses. The pistol roared harmlessly. There was a faint taste of powder in the air, and Johnny's ears rang as he grinned down upon the scrambling men.

"You can't do it," he said." You'd be a fine gang to stick up a truck, you bums! You can't fight!"

He had them bluffed; and if they struck at him again it would be from ambush, or by betrayal.

"You win!" mumbled Pecor. "Luck!"

"Well!" Johnny shrugged. "Want to sail with me?"

"Me? I sail!" grunted Bombard. "By gad, I radder make little money dan fight Johnny Bull!"

"We'll all go," said Pecor.

"And make plans to stick a knife in my back!" laughed Johnny. "All right!"

He turned and went up the companionway, pulled in the dinghy and rowed ashore.

Slowly he climbed to the top of the wooded ridge and looked out over the lake for signs of weather; swept the broad expanse and found it clear of those long, gray patrol boats which sometimes boarded and searched the *Elena* for contraband.

Always useless, those searches, for the sloop had been built to the order of Johnny Bull and he himself had done a good deal of the work on her.

He alone knew the secret of the copper tanks which were so skillfully built into her hull that so far they had never been found.

Johnny Bull had begun with the idea that there would be safety in doing what would not be expected of him. Therefore, instead of buying a boat speedy enough to race with the patrols, he used a sailing craft without an auxiliary engine.

Because of the innocent appearance of the sloop he might have hoped to go on indefinitely but that the villainous looks and nature of his crew almost immediately brought him under suspicion.

He made a rule that no man of his should carry a gun, although the fiasco in the cabin just now had shown that it was not obeyed, for he wanted no killing done.

For this weaponless bootlegging he was forced to handle a bigger gang than would otherwise have been necessary. In his fights with hijackers he needed weight and numbers.

Water and sky were clear of danger signs that day, but Johnny did not go immediately back to the *Elena*. He remained alone on the breeze-kissed ridge, with his rugged face set toward that misty blue spot which was Little Brother Island.

She was a girl of courage to risk such a long canoe trip; of courage and of endurance, for she must have skirted miles of shore to get as far as the cove.

Mary Gray was a girl to make a man happy. With a grimace Johnny reached up and touched the hump that gave him such a monstrous look.

THAT trip of the *Elena* was successful. She came smartly down the lake, and under cover of darkness slipped into the cove. There Johnny Bull ran a rubber hose up from below and emptied his tanks into casks with a hand pump.

His crew remained on deck with no knowledge of how to find the tanks except by ripping the hull of the sloop to kindling.

The casks went ashore in the dinghy and the men dragged them through the woods to an isolated dirt road where they were turned over to waiting trucks.

It was laborious, and against the grain of such men as Pecor and Bombard, but it was as nearly safe as such an enterprise could be made.

The men hated Johnny's methods, but so far they had submitted.

Since the clash in the cabin, however, he had realized that they were smoldering. They wanted only opportunity to take away from him the sloop, and perhaps his life.

There were whispered consultations in camp on shore, and on deck at night when they thought that

the practically never-ending vigilance of the leader was relaxed.

Johnny Bull knew the import of these conferences, and he knew that the only member of his crew who might possibly be loyal was Crazy Bill Stevens. But Crazy Bill would not betray the others, either drunk or sober.

THE *Elena* laid up in the cove while Johnny Bull waited for the usual telegram advising him that there was a cargo to be taken on in Canada.

It was during this period of waiting that he bought a canoe, and while the men wandered to the villages along the lake shore he took long trips in the general direction of Little Brother Island.

It was inevitable that he should meet Mary Gray before he had made many of these trips; and, of course, he knew this subconsciously, although he told himself that lack of exercise drove him to canoeing.

They met, without any great surprise on her part, and thereafter they happened to come together on the lake nearly every day, while the sloop swung at anchor and waited for a code message from the north.

These meetings were strange and stilted, from the first to the last of them. To himself Johnny Bull was an outcast, and never once did he forget it in his intercourse with this girl who was everything that he was not.

His canoe ranged itself alongside hers at a little distance and they talked while they drifted; talked of impersonal things with no reference to his business or his past.

Undoubtedly it was because of his self-imposed aloofness that she allowed herself to meet him again and again. Johnny Bull, the bootlegger, was a strange creature to the daughter of Delano Gray.

Many of the long hours between these meetings Johnny whiled away on top of the ridge at the cove, with his pipe drawing and his rough-hewn face squared off toward Little Brother Island.

SHE had never come to the cove again, or mentioned it to him, and so one day when a twig cracked behind him he leaped and whirled to face danger rather than the level eyes of Mary Gray.

But they were looking at him, across a little space, darkened as they had been that day when she retreated before the menace of Handsome Frank Pecor.

This time, however, it was another emotion which made straight the curves of her lips and touched with sadness the smooth, white forehead.

Johnny Bull smiled, and with a wave of his hand indicated the stump upon which he had been sitting. Still she stood and looked at him in silence. He could feel her gaze sifting through him, trying to find something.

"I didn't expect this pleasure," he said, "but now I know why I've taken to sitting here and watching the weather signs."

"At first I couldn't make up my mind," she said softly, "but now I know that you didn't have anything to do with the shooting."

"Shooting?" he exclaimed. "What shooting?"

"A man's been shot in Valeboro, and rather badly hurt. They say the sheriff thinks it was the Johnny Bull gang that did it."

"What was it all about?"

"A quarrel over a girl."

"Then it was Pecor! I've warned him, half a dozen times!"

"And Pecor is your man!"

"My men are under orders not to

carry arms! That's the best I can do, Miss Gray!"

"Of course, it was none of my business!" she sighed. "But a man who has saved one's life . . . I had to know that you were clear of blame in this!"

"I have no quarrels over girls!" He touched his hump and stared at her fixedly. "Naturally not!"

"Oh!" Mary Gray beat her slim hands together. "Why don't you stop all this? Don't you know that . . . that you're selling crooked waters?"

"And what would I gain by that?" The face of Johnny Bull became granite. "What would I gain by stopping?"

He did not believe that there was any such thing under the heavens above as a love that could look beyond disgrace and deformity, but if there were, then Mary Gray was capable of it.

"You would gain . . . gain . . . *yourself*!"

Johnny Bull laughed, with a finality of bitterness. Why should she look upon him with anything more than pity?

"I am myself now," he said, "and I am satisfied!"

"I never before saw a man who could be proud of being bad!"

"It's not exactly that!" with a smile.

He preferred to treat the moment lightly, and yet tell her the truth.

"There's no dark secret behind me. I came back from France broke, in '19. And prohibition came just in time to help me out. There's a small fortune packed away in a little compartment in the *Elena's* cabin. And when I get tired of the game I'll take it! That's all!"

WHILE he spoke her face changed. A light glowed in her eyes, and then became hidden by a mist of tears. She conquered a trembling lip before she spoke.

"I begin to understand now! But the service . . . how could you . . ."

She flushed, hesitating, and Johnny patted his hump with a dry laugh.

"It wasn't there then!"

"Ah!" Mary Gray stared out over the dancing waters. Sunlight played upon the little leaping waves. It was as though the lake were having a gala day. A fleck of white cloud driven across the blue; Mary Gray like a dark jewel in the setting of the green forest.

Everything except Johnny Bull was beautiful. His lips moved as though he were were upon the brink of speech; then he turned away and went rapidly down toward the beach where the dinghy waited for him.

CHAPTER V

WAR TO THE KNIFE

JOHNNY Bull knew that Pecor would be driven to action of some kind. The sheriff would probably connect him with the shooting and then there would be a warrant out for him.

Instead of merely being under suspicion as a rum-runner he would be a fugitive from justice, and he would have to move. If he were ever going to make another attempt to seize the sloop this was his time.

That something was happening, Johnny Bull knew when darkness settled over the cove with no member of his crew back on board. A dead calm had fallen upon the lake and the sun had set in a cloudless sky.

There was no possibility of getting the *Elena* out that evening, even if he had wanted to flee from the danger of attack. There was nothing to do but wait for dawn.

Through the quiet evening Johnny Bull sat on the deckhouse and smoked, listening to the rustle and murmur from the forest and thinking his thoughts. The tme had come for a change in his affairs.

During the past few years he had achieved a kind of numbness which served for peace of spirit; his pleasure had been the thrill of danger, the shock of those swift battles which had come out of his wild life.

Even if there had not been this present trouble with Pecor, Mary Gray would have made the change necessary. Johnny Bull did not want to see her again, for the sake of the little happiness he now had.

This night he suffered from longing for her, even while he told himself that he had long since lost the power to trust man or woman. She pitied him; but it could not be that she would ever feel any other emotion for Johnny Bull.

THROUGH the first half of the night he meditated; and from midnight to dawn he slept, rolled up in a blanket on deck, where the sound of a small boat coming alongside would awaken him.

Morning was flooding the cove when Johnny threw off his blanket and stood up to stretch. For a moment he stood poised on his toes, trying to name to himself what was wrong. Then he realized that the dinghy was gone. An end of the painter hung over the stern, cut through by a knife. That had been done after he went to sleep.

To Johnny there was no sense in this theft. If his men had come back they would either have come in peace or for the purpose of capturing the sloop, he thought.

Puzzled, he went below to shave and eat a little cold breakfast. Still no wind, and he ought to be moving. With the dinghy he could have towed the *Elena* out of the cove to pick up any breeze that might be drifting over the lake, but now that was impossible.

His alert glance was caught and held by a movement on shore at the edge of the woods. A human being was there, tumbled against a rock. Johnny Bull went over the side instantly and struck out, having little idea of what he was to find.

It was not until the pebbles of the beach were under his feet that his heart seemed to leap up and choke him.

He bounded forward and with something akin to a whimper in his throat he knelt beside Mary Gray.

She was conscious, but it was a space of many seconds before she recognized him, before the blankness and the terror went out of her eyes and she gained strength sufficient to sit up.

She clung frantically to his arm, as though he were a refuge in the midst of gale-beaten waters. The gay sweater and tweed skirt of yesterday were torn and soiled.

Her arms and face were scratched; a bruise upon her forehead had become greenish blue. Dry sobs shook her.

"Don't let them get me!" she begged in a whisper.

"Nothing can hurt you now," he told her; and when she had grown quieter he asked:

"What happened?"

"Pecor!"

At her own mention of the name Mary Gray's fingers gripped the hand of Johnny.

"He and the others met me yesterday when I was walking back to the main road, after I'd been talking to you. I found out later that they were on their way to kill you and take the sloop.

They were going to stop at our island on their way to Canada, for

me. But meeting me like that changed their plans. As long as they had me there was plenty of time in which to deal with you and get the boat. For you couldn't get away in a calm.

"I FOUGHT Pecor, and he tied me up. That was how I got so hurt. After that it would have been . . . horrible, if he hadn't had trouble with the men. They were very drunk.

"Pecor fought with one named Bombard, and knocked him down. It had got dark, and the first thing I knew somebody was cutting the ropes that tied me to a tree. It was a man they called Crazy Bill. He set me free."

"I'll remember that!" said Johnny, in a voice heavy with the promise of vengeance upon his crew. "When I settle the long account I've got with Pecor and the others I'll remember that Crazy Bill and I are square!"

"I don't know how soon they missed me," she went on brokenly. "It couldn't have been long. I heard them coming and shouting. All night I ran, and fell down, and got up and ran again.

"I think my mind went bad after a time. I don't remember getting here . . . nothing until I recognized you!"

"They'll get here before long!" muttered Johnny, staring out toward the *Elena*.

"As soon as they give up trying to find you they'll come for the sloop. It must have been some of them that stole the dinghy during the night."

"Yes! Once when they passed near some bushes where I was hidden I heard Pecor say they'd row along the shore to see if I'd come over from the island in a canoe! They wanted to cut me off if I had."

"Do you think you can swim out?"

"I'll try!"

She stood up bravely, only to reel and fall back into his arms. He set her down gently so that she could rest against the rock.

"That's out!" breathed Johnny.

He swept the sky with a glance.

"If we could get on board we'd be all right. There's a bit of wind coming."

"Go!" said Mary Gray faintly. "If they find you they'll kill you. They've all got guns now! I can hide in the woods."

Johnny Bull looked down into her white, bruised face. He met the gray eyes which had spoken to him with such silent power, shattering his semblance of peace.

He smiled, and the rugged contours of his face melted.

"Sloops and worlds can be lost and found again," he said softly, "but there is only one Mary Gray. I stay here while you need me!"

Tears of weakness filled her eyes; her lips struggled to speak. But before she could do more than choke back a sob and lift one scratched hand toward him a whip-like crack broke the morning stillness of the cove.

Johnny spun around, and half around again, under the shock. Then with arms flung out he fell, face downward, digging his mighty fingers into the sand.

AN instant, then his muscles contracted. He started to lift himself. The bullet had found no vital spot. He was sure now, although when he fell he thought that the end had come.

Johnny whipped his thoughts to meet and solve the riddle of what to do in the next few seconds, in order that Mary Gray might be saved.

But she still believed that he was stricken by death. He felt her arms around his neck; heard her sob-torn voice in his ears.

"Oh, God! Don't let him be dead! No! No!"

CHAPTER VI

TRAIL'S END

SOMETHING like a light bathed the mind of Johnny Bull as he raised his face from the sand. It was a cleansing light, taking away the stains of doubt and bitterness.

Five minutes before, he would not have believed that any woman like Mary Gray could speak in that tone to Johnny Bull.

Strength and purpose and courage filled him. He knew that he was going to save her, although he did not yet know how.

He raised his shoulders half a foot and, turning, smiled into her astonished eyes.

"I'm all right, I guess, but if I get up they'll shoot again. Look across the cove and tell me what you see."

"But you're hit!" she exclaimed, while the color raced back to her checks.

"Anyhow I can move all my legs and arms! "Do you see anybody?"

"They're all over there, with the boat," she told him.

"They're watching us . . . and talking . . . now two of them are shoving off in the dinghy . . . and Pecor and the others are coming around by the shore!"

"Then I've got time for what I want to do," exclaimed Johnny. "I don't want them to have the Elena!"

"But they're all armed—"

"That's nothing! I'm going to swim out to the sloop and back before Pecor can get here . . . and if you sit as you are they may not notice that I've gone into the water. It's too far for them to see detail! I'll come back with a gun!"

"If I could go with you. . . ."

He saw how utterly impossible that was; yet if he could have got her on board he could have saved both her and the *Elena* from the mutineers. But there was no time for thinking of what might have been.

JOHNNY BULL lay no more than a couple of feet from the lapping waves; he rolled into the water as unostentatiously as he could and began to swim with all the power he was able to summon.

He knew now where that bullet had found him, and he smiled. If he and Mary Gray lived through the next quarter of an hour he would have a surprise for her; yes, and another for Pecor's gang, and still another for himself.

This last one struck him as a majestic joke on the part of destiny. He would tell it to Mary Gray . . . if they lived.

The sloping hull of the *Elena* was over his head; as he pulled himself out of the water he glanced toward shore.

Pecor and Crazy Bill, Riley and Stubby Holcomb were moving at a brisk walk along the beach. Evidently they had not seen him go into the water nor learned yet that Mary, sitting with bowed shoulders among the rocks, was mourning over nothing.

The sound of oarlocks and the scrape of wood against wood came from the other side of the *Elena*. That would be Ommidy Bombard and Tiptoe Sullivan, since they were the two not with Pecor; probably one of them was there to pull up

the anchor and make sail while the other took the dinghy to Pecor.

He would have need of it to bring Mary on board. Johnny wondered grimly whether the men had any suspicion that his lion's share of the *Elena's* profits lay in crisp yellow bills in a little recess behind the paneling at the head of Pecor's bunk.

THE heads of the two boarding parties appeared above the coaming on opposite sides of the sloop at the same moment, Bombard and Johnny Bull staring at each other.

The fat, evil face was battered from the fight with Pecor; it hung there on the starboard quarter for a little interval, mouth gaping in astonishment that the man who had been struck down on shore a few minutes ago should come up out of the water so very much alive.

Johnny Bull went over the port rail ad met Bombard before he could get on deck. He wrenched a hesitating pistol out of his hand; and then he took the padded throat of Ommidy in a grip of steel while he brought the butt of the pistol down upon the head of Tiptoe Sullivan.

Sullivan's hand stayed in the pocket where it had gone for a gun; he dropped to the bottom of the boat.

Johnny dragged Bombard on board and shoved the dinghy away so that it went drifting rapidly toward the mouth of the cove.

"Ommidy," he said, gazing down into the slowly purpling face, "give me a match. Mine are all wet."

But Bombard could not even think of matches; his breath had been shut off for seconds and both hands were clutching the arm of Johnny Bull with a death grip. His knees slacked.

Johnny let him fall then; to lie and drink in great gulps of air. He found a box of matches in Bombard's pocket. A glance toward shore showed Pecor and the others moving in the direction of Mary Gray, apparently without having noticed that anything unusual had happened on board the *Elena.*

"Buck up, Ommidy," said Johnny Bull. "You'll have to swim in a minute!"

HE dropped Bombard's pistol into his pocket and leaped down the companionway. It would have taken no more than a minute to go over there to the bunk where Pecor slept and get his money from a concealed cupboard.

But that minute belonged to Mary Gray and he would not have taken it away from her for all the money in the world. It was for another purpose that he had come down into the cabin.

Johnny ripped out an innocent-looking hook in the side wall, where his clothing had hung many a night, and revealed a little white stub peeping through a tiny hole that had been concealed by an iron plate at the base of the hook.

He scratched a match and touched it to the stub; and the frayed end of what looked like thick cord seemed to welcome the flame. It sputtered and threw out sparks red against the darkness of the hole.

Johnny Bull went back on deck with a swiftness which smashed all his own records for speed. There he found Ommidy Bombard swaying and feeling his throat.

Johnny paused, grinning, with a hand on the rail as he poised himself to go overboard.

"Swim for it, Ommidy!" he said. "I've just lighted a fuse that's got about three minutes to burn before it connects with half a bushel of dynamite that's packed under the deck!"

Pecor and the others had stopped,

and Handsome Frank was pointing toward the drifting dinghy. Bombard plunged into the water with a guttural cry.

Johnny dropped into the water and hoped they would not see his head and shoot it full of holes before he could get to the shelter of the rocks where Mary waited.

Johnny Bull swam, and kept on hoping as he strained toward shore. It seemed an eternity before a thunder of dynamite split the air behind him, a spatter of fragments playing on the water.

A yellow hundred-dollar bill floated down and rode like a leaf ahead of him. A wave from the explosion swept over his head.

It was just as he rose, crouching, with the ground once more under his feet, that Pecor saw him. The men on shore had stopped, evidently, when the Elena blew up, but they were close enough for a pistol shot.

An automatic blazed from the hand of the mate. Johnny leaped for the rocks, drawing the gun he had taken from Bombard.

BUT Pecor did not fire a second shot. As Johnny dropped beside Mary Gray he saw Handsome Frank sprawl on the sand; saw the swinging arm of Crazy Bill Stevens, and knew that he owed another debt to that member of his crew who had been most nearly worthless.

Holcomb and Riley leaped for Crazy Bill, but now Johnny Bull was standing up and covering them with his pistol.

"Put your hands up, and keep 'em there!" he shouted.

While they stood like that, Riley and Holcomb with their hands in the air, and Pecor poised in the act of reaching for the gun he had dropped, a hail came from the mouth of the cove. Instantly Crazy Bill Stevens ducked for the shelter of the woods.

Johnny threw a glance over his shoulder. A long, gray motorboat was gliding silently toward them and across the gunwales rifles lay like black threats.

Johnny Bull flung away his pistol and swept Mary behind the rocks. A bullet smacked against that rock and a command came from the patrol boat.

Johnny swung Mary Gray into his arms and plunged out of sight in the undergrowth. There he stopped, set her down and drew breath. Through the screen of leaves Johnny Bull could see the action that was taking place on the beach.

He saw Pecor draw his hand into his pocket. But before the black muzzle was raised high enough to fire, Frank Pecor's arms lifted to the heaven he had denied. He swayed a little, then flattened, face down on the sand.

"Done!" exclaimed Johnny Bull in a whisper. "And not by my hand!"

The voice of Mary Gray was in Johnny's ear; her hands pulled at him.

"Go on alone!" she pleaded. "Now that the officers are here I'm in no danger! They must have been searching for me, and the explosion brought them!"

"Mary Gray," he said, taking her hands and smiling down at her, "I'm not in any danger, either, for Johnny Bull is going to disappear in a minute and John Becket will go back to his own life, his life as it used to be.

"Pecor's name was Barker, and he was once my partner. He robbed me of a fortune while I was in France.

"Then he came up here and masqueraded as a French Canadian, but I hunted him down. I blew a fortune up with the *Elena* . . . it was the one Barker stole from me.

"But I couldn't save it and get back to you! What's a fortune?"

"But I don't understand——" she began.

"Wait!"

He stepped away from her, laughing with a new ring in his voice, and ripped open his shirt.

His hands fumbled inside the coarse flannel, while he twisted his body from side to side and bent nearly double in what was evidently a difficult task.

"What . . . what in the world are you doing?" she exclaimed uncertainly. "Oh, I wish you'd save yourself!"

"I will in a minute!" he told her.

"I'll show you John Becket, and he'll be perfectly safe. Darn those buckles! Most bad characters disguise themselves after they've done something and want to make a getaway, but I started out with the disguise so I could be myself when I wanted to!

"My face will always be the same old face except that I shave, but they'll never believe that John Becket is the same man as Johnny Bull, the hunchback!"

WITH a sudden jerk that almost stripped him of his shirt he brought forth a leather-covered mound from his shoulder. Worn straps dangled from it.

Becket laughed joyously at Mary Gray's cry of astonishment, and he straightened back as fine a pair of shoulders as any man need have.

"There's my hump, Mary! Made of leather on a steel frame. And that's what stopped the bullet! See the hole?

"Here's John Becket, Mary dear, straight in body and sorry now that he ever went sailing in crooked waters. . . . And he wants to know if you have any use for a man who's broke, but who loves you more than . . . than . . ."

"Don't try, John!" She moved toward him, with her gray eyes more beautiful than he had ever seen them. "Just say 'as much as I love you!' "

The Wise Fool

By NEIL MORAN

LEM HORDEN was called the fool of the town, but beyond that the appellation didn't go. He wasn't called the town's loafer, for no one thought of Lem as a loafer.

He was too young and innocent for that. Loafer to those Plainville people represented some sort of man who knew more than Lem, who was less ambitious than Lem and who probably drank—which Lem never did.

Lem in some respects was a model boy. He never smoked; he never drank; and no one had ever heard him cuss. He was never seen to roll dice—that game which was so popular on the Four Corners when the constable wasn't around. And when it came to cards—well, Lem wouldn't have known the difference between a straight and a royal flush in poker, though he did admit that he had played fan-tan.

Yes, he was, in his way, held in high esteem, but he was the town's fool. Everybody made a fool out of Lem and he didn't seem to mind.

When he went to work for Mr. Crabtree in Crabtree's General Store, that distinguished citizen told him: "Now, Lem, I know you're alone in the world, and perhaps that's why you're such a fool. You ain't never had any one to look after you ever since them people died that took you out of the orphan asylum. Too bad they didn't leave anything for you to get along on. But you've been knocking around for years here doing odd jobs and now I'm going to make a man out of you and give you four dollars a week."

Crabtree expected Lem to go into ecstasies but Lem simply said: "Four dollars. That's a lot of money. All right. I'll work."

So he became the general assistant and the delivery boy, and when he had nothing else to do he went up to Crabtree's house and mowed the lawn.

Crabtree was getting his money's worth and he knew it. He used to think: "The young fool. If he had any sense to him he would demand more. But I got him for four dollars and I'll keep him for life."

Then one night, Crabtree's safe was rifled and a hundred dollars was taken. Of course, Lem wasn't suspected. It would have been easier to have suspected the constable than Lem. When that official stepped in on the case and demanded to know

all about it, Crabtree, with much verbiage, gave the facts.

"I admit," he added, "that I forgot to lock the safe. I remember now. And that window was forced. It's as plain as the nose on your face that someone got in and took the money. This case—big for Plainville—roused him from his lethargy, and for days he walked around looking suspiciously at every one in town. Every one but Lem.

"That young fool," he thought, "wouldn't know enough to steal. Doesn't swear, doesn't smoke, doesn't gamble and works for four dollars a week. No, he didn't do it. But who the hell did?"

In time the mystery went the way of other mysteries and was tossed into the past. Plainville forgot about it but Crabtree never did.

"Funny," he used to say to Lem, "where that money went."

"Yep, it's funny," Lem would answer. "Oh, well, murder will out."

"But this ain't a murder," Crabtree retorted, when Lem designated it as such. "It's a robbery. Don't you know the difference between a murder and a robbery?"

"Oh, well," Lem said on this occasion, "you know what I mean."

And Crabtree thought: "The young fool. He ain't got a lick of sense."

IT was shortly after this that Mr. Hiller's stable was entered one night and three of his horses disappeared. Once again the constable came and asked questions, and once again he went out to look suspiciously at everyone in town—everyone but Lem. That young man he saw when he broke up a crap game in front of Barner's store, and stooped to pick up the dice and the seventy-five cents which, for the time being, he dropped into his pocket.

"Hi there, Lem," he said. "I just been after them gamblers again. It's a good thing you ain't like that. Never gamble, my boy."

"No, sir," said Lem, looking at him innocently. "I heard that Mr. Hiller lost two of his bays."

"Three," said the constable. "And it's my opinion that there's a dangerous character in town. You ain't been seeing any strangers, have you? Anyone that would——"

"No, sir," said Lem, and he raised his hat to the majesty of the law and passed along.

"There goes a fine boy," said the constable, thinking of how Lem had raised his hat. That pleased the constable and his chest swelled. "He knows a real officer when he sees one. He told me so."

For Lem, time and again, had told the constable, "You ought to be in a big city, Mr. Flatbird, at the head of a police department. Yes, sir, that's where you belong."

And while the constable knew that Lem was a young fool, he liked him. Yes, you couldn't help but like Lem when he talked like that.

When another robbery occurred two weeks later, and another a week after that, the citizens of Plainville began to sit up and take notice. It had got so that one didn't know whether to trust the person who lived next door. And this, in a town where the doors had been left unlocked nights for many years past.

But now all doors were locked. Old stories came to light. Someone remembered that old Crabtree's father was a horse thief, and that even the constable's grandfather had been something of a crook. There was the time when he stole a dog and sold him for a dollar to a man he met on the street.

Plainville, with its analytical minds, began to see in this portentious signs. But these didn't very well apply to Crabtree. Crabtree

had been robbed. No, it wasn't likely that he had robbed himself, though there were three other jobs that he might have done. And as for the constable, he might have done all four.

Of course, this was ridiculous. And even citizens who spoke about it knew how preposterous it was. But somebody had started it and somebody else who had read a book on heredity had done the rest. Was it possible that the constable was a crook?

When the constable heard these rumors, he drew out his nightstick and started walking through the town. He met Lem up at the Four Corners, and Lem raised his hat.

"Ah, how are you, son?" said Mr. Flatbird, who appreciated the hat doffing more than ever this day. "You don't know who started this talk about my grandfather stealing a dog?"

"No, sir," said Lem. "But I heard about it. Of course, it's all wrong. But what are you going to do about these robberies, Mr. Flatbird? If this keeps up, the town'll be broke."

IT was decided a week later, after another expert job, to call in a real detective. Plainville was in a state of suspense. Plainville wanted results and its fair name cleared. So, after much correspondence, a Mr. William Connors, of the Plymouth Detective Agency, arrived.

Mr. Connors was a real detective, from his square toes to his fat cigar. He was a burly man, a little nearsighted, though he didn't admit that. He came to the town carrying credentials and a bottle of the best booze. But this he secreted, for outside of the fact that its usage was illegal except in the prescribed manner, he didn't want to share it with any of the citizenry who might have a large and unquenchable thirst.

But after he had registered in the Plainville Hotel—such as it was—he went to his room and took two good drinks.

"Now," he said, "there's a crook in this town and I'm going to get him."

So saying, he went down the stairs and out into the street.

It was a warm afternoon. The sun made Mr. Connors hot and the booze made him hotter. He was baking. But with it all he had a pleasant feeling, a feeling that if he caught the crook it would be a shame to lock him up.

At the corner, he turned and bunked into the majesty of the law.

"Ah, how are you, commissioner?" he said.

He knew that Mr. Flatbird was something in the town, for the large and constantly polished shield informed him of that.

"I'm not the commissioner," said the constable. "We ain't got the time and money to waste on an official like that. But I understand you're the detective from the big city. Well, chief, you're up against a stone wall."

Mr. Connors was up against someone's door. Having stopped, he rested his back against it because it happened to be there, and also because all of a sudden he had the most disconcerting feeling that the sidewalk was coming up into his face.

And then, without a word of warning, he collapsed.

"Wonder what's the matter with him," said Mr. Flatbird.

Then, leaning over and smelling Mr. Connor's breath, he muttered mournfully, "Yep, he's drunk."

He was not only drunk but he was out. Not dead but very near to it. He was taken away, his room was inspected, and there came to light a bottle of whisky.

That, of course, took Mr. Connors

off the case. When Lem heard about it, he shook his head.

"Sure is terrible," he said. "This town has got a jinx. Honest, I'm getting scared of it. I think I'll go away."

The following day he went down to Mr. Crabtree and told him what he thought.

"There are ghosts of some kind in this town," he said. "I'm going to leave. Robberies, and now that detective has been taken away almost dead."

"Don't be a fool," said Crabtree. "That's idle talk."

"Just the same," said Lem, "I'm going."

And while Crabtree tried to hold him, Lem went.

Sunshine was another town ten miles away, but Sunshine was different from Plainville. It had speakeasies and women who danced on tables and men who sold their votes for a dollar or five, depending on how much the boys would give.

It was quite a place. An imitation of one of those hell holes that we so often see in the movies. Riotous living, and that sort of thing. But law was there, even though it wasn't prominent, and all the dirty business was conducted in a mysterious way.

IN this town our model young man was known as Kid Jinks. He had gone over there, one night, and announced that he came from the wide open spaces, and he told them some of the things he had read in books. Only he didn't mention the books. He was the book, the one volume, and it was his autobiography that he handed out.

Like other autobiographies it was embellished. Unlike other autobiographies it didn't contain a word of truth. But for some reason, it got over. Here he was not looked upon as a young fool.

He was a liberal spender. Not that he had so much to spend but he did it in a way that attracted attention. And when his money ran out, he thought of Plainville and the old job at four dollars a week, and he decided to go back. He liked Plainville. He liked it for more reasons than one.

So, two days later, Silas Crabtree was a little surprised to find his old boy back.

"What!" he said. "You here, Lem! What drove you home?"

"Oh, I got tired of being away," said Lem. "And then I thought that that scare I had was all wrong. I guess there ain't no jinx on this town. No, sir. I'll come back if you say."

Crabtree looked at him and shook his head.

"At the old wages?" he asked.

"Suits me," said Lem.

So Lem went back at four dollars a week.

When Mr. Flatbird heard about it, he was surprised.

"What? Lem back?" he said to Crabtree. "Where is the boy?"

"Oh, deliverin' an order," said Silas. "He's the same young fool."

It was on that same afternoon that Lem met Mr. Flatbird on the street. Mr. Flatbird had just broken up a crap game and had made twenty-six cents.

"Hi there, Lem," he said. "I'm glad to see you back. Where you been, son?"

"Oh, travelin'," said Lem and Flatbird laughed.

"Guess you didn't get far," he said.

"No," said Lem. "But some day I hope to take a trip around the world."

An arrival in Plainville is something of an event. And even such an arrival as Lem created something of a stir. In fact, a celebrity couldn't

have caused more talk, for Lem was something of a celebrity in his way. He was the town's fool. And the fact that he had gone away and come back added considerable significance to his name.

That day he was greeted on all sides.

"How are you, Lem?"

"Glad to see you back."

"Where you been?"

"You ain't growed an inch. Ha-ha! And you got the same face."

Lem thought that that person might have added: "And you're the same fool."

And this made Lem smile, for that particular person was none other than Mr. Hiller, he who had lamented the loss of three horses.

ON Friday morning something happened that gave Lem a shock. It shocked others as well. Mr. Flatbird himself seemed highly perturbed and when he told Silas Crabtree about it, the old grocer stroked his chin.

"Jim Corver's been robbed, you say! Well, well. Are we goin' to have this business all over again?"

"I don't know," Mr. Flatbird confessed. "And I admit I'm up a tree. But whoever did it knew his game. Jim and his wife went over to Northend, and when they got back some money and jewelry were gone. A window had been forced. It reminds me of those other times. You member, Silas, when——"

"Yes, only too well. I remember that I lost something myself."

Mr. Flatbird looked cautiously to the door and stroked his chin.

"Look here, Silas," he said, "I've been thinking of something that seems unbelievable, and yet I got something to work on. You know I'm a constable and my mind runs that way. I ain't like the ordinary man. I think things out. So because I'm a detective I've been thinking of this."

He leaned over and whispered: "Has it occurred to you that those robberies took place when Lem was here, and now this one when he's come back?"

"Gosh, no!" said Silas. "You don't suspect Lem?"

"Who knows?" said Mr. Flatbird, rocking back and forth on heels and toes. "I ask you to consider this: He was away for weeks and no robberies were done. He comes back and a robbery occurs. And before he went away, mind you—well, you know the rest."

"But I can't believe that Lem did it," said Silas. "Why, he's a fool!"

"Sure he's a fool. But how do we know that he hasn't fooled us all? I ask you to think of the first case. Right here in your store. Then figure out the rest. Yes, sir, it's my opinion that Lem is a thief!"

By degrees Mr. Crabtree was convinced. The constable had presented a logical case.

"We know," he said, "that we were never troubled with crooks until you were robbed. And then after those other robberies Lem went away. Now why did he do it?

"Then he comes back. He figured that he wasn't suspected and he came back to get more."

It seemed to Mr. Crabtree that the constable had proved his case.

"But how are you going to prove it?" he asked. "You need more than you got."

"You leave it to me," said the constable. "I'm a detective and I'll get my man."

He waited in the store until Lem got back. Lem came in smiling, giving the constable an innocent look.

"How are you, Mr. Flatbird?" he said, and he opened his mouth in that idiotic grin.

The constable looked at him. He

walked right over and placed a hand on Lem's arm.

"What were you doing in Jim Corver's house last night?" he demanded.

Lem shrank back.

"Come on," said the constable, misconstruing Lem's expression, "tell us the truth. You think you were smart. You thought you were putting something over on us. But——"

"Do you mean that Mr. Corver's been robbed?" gasped Lem, and his surprise was so genuine that Crabtree and the constable were taken aback.

"That's what I mean," said Mr. Flatbird. "And I guess we know who's been the crook in this town."

Lem stammered and hung his head.

"Why, why, I didn't rob Mr Corver," he said. "Honest, I didn't. I'm as much surprised as you."

"It won't go," said the constable. "I'm going to look you up."

He was angry now, angry because he was stumped. Lem's sincerity annoyed him. There came to his mind a big doubt.

"If you'll confess," he said, "it'll go easier with you. If you won't, you'll go to the jail."

Lem shook his head.

"I have nothing to confess," he said.

"Very well," said Mr. Flatbird, his aggravation growing. "You go to jail."

"Wait a minute, constable," said Silas. "Don't you think you're a little rash about this?"

"Didn't we agree," said Mr. Flatbird, "that we proved our case? If he can fool you, he can't fool me. I tell you, he's a slick boy."

So, protesting, Lem was taken to jail.

When the citizens heard about it, they were up in arms.

"Why, it's perfectly ridiculous!" more than one said.

Even Jim Corver himself said that it was a shame. And, because he refused to enter into it and public opinion was running high, Lem was released, and the constable hung his head.

It was a bitter pill to swallow, and he made a wry face. He had built a hypothesis that had slowly crumbled into ruins.

FOR twenty-four hours, Lem was the outstanding figure in the town. Everybody sympathized with him except Flatbird, who followed him with sorry eyes down the street.

"It's a shame, Lem, that's what it is!"

"Never you mind. We know you're a good boy."

"Don't let it upset you, Lem. That constable is a fool!"

And then the well-wishers would walk off thinking of another fool, and that, of course, was Lem.

On Saturday night, Crabgtree locked up, bade Lem good night, and Lem walked out into the street.

It was the constable who hailed him as he passed Barner's store.

"Hi there, Lem," he said. "I want to talk to you, son."

Lem stopped. He saw that the constable was extending a friendly hand.

"I'm sorry about the mistake," he said. "I know now you didn't rob Jim Corver's house."

"It's all right," said Lem. He seemed perplexed. "What made you change your mind, constable?" he asked innocently.

"Why, simply that I've got another idea. I've had my eye on a suspicious looking character in town. I saw this feller today and when I started to walk after him, he commenced to run. Then he shot into

them woods down there and got away.

It's all as plain now as the nose on your face. That's the feller that's been robbin' this town. And when I get my hands on him, he goes to jail."

"Well, I guess he's the feller all right," said Lem. "There ain't no hard feelings on my part, Mr. Flatbird. You only did what you thought was right." He wrung the constable's hand.

"Good-night, sir," he said, and, raising his hat, he went up the street.

There were tears in the constable's eyes. "I should have known better than to have accused him," he choked. "Of course, he didn't do it. He's just a fool."

Lem continued on his way until he reached his shack. It was in another part of town. He lighted the oil lamp, sat down on the broken bed and thought of what the constable had said.

So there was a suspicious looking character in town. Lem nodded as if he thoroughly approved of that. Then he got up, looked at his watch, and sat down.

He was thinking of Sunshine; other things, too. His mind had that way of jumping, without concentrating on one thing for any length of time.

But his thoughts got back to Sunshine and he thought of the speakeasy there, and the crowd of Sunshine denizens who knew him as Kid Jinks. He decided to go over and strut a while. He didn't smoke, he didn't drink, but he did like to show off.

So when it got around ten o'clock, he put on his hat, opened the door and went out. Then thoughts of Sunshine vanished. He was thinking of something else.

It was now 9.55. He calculated, made up his mind, and started to walk down the street. And before eleven o'clock he was back in one of his old haunts. The crowd was glad to see him.

"Where have you been, kid?" someone asked.

"Oh, I've been travelin' around the country," said Lem. "You know me. I always keep on the go. Give them all a drink, boss. The drinks are on me."

He drew out a roll of bills, and more than one person gasped.

"What have you been doin', kid, playin' the ponies?"

"Oh, I've been making a little money. You know me."

He took a fifty-dollar bill and threw it on the table.

"Drink up," he said. "And make mine ginger ale."

For two hours he was the king there. They sang songs about him and said that he was a jolly good fellow, and they all got drunk except Lem. He was enjoying this. It pleased him to think that these people didn't consider him a fool.

Around one o'clock he grew tired and decided to go home. He had spent seventy-five dollars, which included several generous tips.

"Well, good-night," he said. "See you again."

The boss wrung his hand.

"Good-night, kid," he said. "Call again. Always glad to see you."

Lem Horden stepped out into the night. He drew in his breath. Then he started to walk.

As he headed toward the railroad station, two men who had been in the speakeasy followed him down the road. They were drunk but they knew what they were doing. They weren't forgetting that the popular young man had displayed a large roll.

A train lumbered in, the last passenger train going that way that night, and Lem got on. The two men followed and sat behind him in the second car.

At Plainville Lem got out, and while he didn't know it, the two men followed him up the road. Then, as he neared his shack, he turned and saw the two men right behind him.

One of them was calling for him to stop. But Lem, suddenly remembering the money he was carrying, started to run. He reached his shack and bolted the door. He sat down on the bed listening, muscles taut, mind alert.

And then came a rap on the door. Lem blew out the light and reached for a gun. The rap came again, but he didn't move. Then, in through a window crawled a figure and Lem raised his gun.

"Go way!" he said. "I'll kill you!"

A bullet spat and Lem rolled over on the floor. A figure shot across the room and unbolted the door.

"Strike a match, Jerry, I think I've killed this bird."

Jerry struck a match and looked down into Lem's face. He rolled him over; shook his head.

"You got him," he said. "Well, let's get that money and blow."

THE following day, Mr. Flatbird entered Silas Crabtree's store.

"I guess you've heard all about it, Si," he said. "It certainly rocked this town. It's my opinion that the one who killed poor Lem was that feller I seen around this town. If I ever lay my hands on him, I'll lock him up. For he's the one, Si, that was doin' all these jobs.

"He's the one that broke into your safe last night, and then in some way got into Lem's shack and killed him. Yes, sir, it's as plain as the nose on your face. He thought, perhaps, that Lem's place was deserted and went there to hide. And then when he found Lem, he killed him. I'm a detective and I figure things out."

Old Crabtree stroked his chin.

"And yet, constable," he said, "it's strange. I'm thinking of what you told me that day. Of how you had Lem under suspicion. And now Lem's dead and I've been robbed. But I guess it was that other feller. No, Lem didn't do it. Poor Lem was just a fool!"

The Dallas Heart

By ETHEL WALBERT

A THREE-PART STORY—PART II

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED:

Jerry Longwood *and a girl, who is impersonating his cousin* Nancy Lee, *meet in a swamp during a storm and go together to* Swamp Hollow, *the house of Jerry's uncle, old* Abner Longwood. *Jerry has come in search of the* Dallas Heart, *which the girl guesses to be some sort of precious heirloom, and the girl has come to try to get poor Nancy's rightful share of the estate from the old miser.*

They are already half in love by the time they reach Swamp Hollow. There they find Abner Longwood—dead. Jerry admits that he had been at the house earlier in the evening, but that he had fled at sight of the dead man. He rather lamely explains away the blood on his hands and sleeve by saying that he had been at a slaughtering house the day before.

They hear a mysterious groan, the girl sees what seems to be the face of Abner, and then the body disappears. They decide to make a hurried search for the Dallas Heart and then leave the place.

While Jerry goes into the attic to look, the girl waits for him below, in front of an oil painting of Abner. Suddenly the portrait is illuminated, swings forward—and Abner Longwood, in the flesh, appears behind it with a candle in his hand and a snarl on his face.

CHAPTER VII

THE LIVING REPLICA

SWOONING would have been a great relief to my highly-tortured nerves, but no such deliverance came to me.

I simply fell forward and struck my head on the sharp edge of the huge picture frame and this, instead of bringing insensibility, irritated and aroused me. The acute pain of the fall served to banish some of my fear.

Before I could recover my balance and spring back, the menacing fig-

ure gave vent to a noise that was more of a snarl than a grunt and, with wonderful strength and agility for one so old, he snatched at my arms and pulled me upright.

I recoiled, striking back at him, for I was not entirely sure yet whether it was Abner Longwood in flesh and blood or his spirit, and I tried desperately to free myself from his clutch.

At the same time I renewed my screaming, calling Jerry from the tower with all the power and strength I could command. The echoes of my voice filled the hall and went booming up and down the stairway.

I knew Jerry would hear me. Apparently Abner Longwood thought so too, for he clapped a hand over my mouth and told me to shut up.

He spoke like a man of flesh and blood and not like a spirit. This stimulated me to fight the harder, and I had all but broken away from his grasp when my foot slipped and I lost my balance.

Then it was that I heard Jerry call: "Nancy! What is it? I'm coming!"

What a blessed relief it was to hear his voice! No sweeter sound had ever reached my ears. He was coming to my assistance, although from the muffled voice I judged he was far away, and the flash of his light had not yet appeared on the stairs.

My assailant was for an instant torn by doubt, for he leaped back into the hole in the wall and started to slide the mammoth picture back in place, and then he paused, glaring down at me.

"Coming, Nancy!" I heard Jerry shout, his voice nearer.

The effect of his call was electrical on old Abner Longwood. With a snarl of rage and fear he jumped out of the opening in the wall and seized me in his two arms.

He lifted me as easily as if I had been a child. I was startled by the tremendous physical strength he showed. Even a much younger man might well have been proud of this feat.

He swung me easily over his head and thrust me into the opening. Then, leaping after me, he touched either a spring or a knob, and the huge, framed portrait closed noiselessly, shutting out all view of the hall.

"Nancy! Nancy!"

I heard Jerry shouting, and I knew he was on the stairs coming down.

I tried to answer him, but a hand clutched at my throat and another over my mouth. I gurgled and fought in the dark, but I was no match for my assailant.

He didn't choke me into insensibility, but he paralyzed my vocal cords and made me too weak and helpless to resist. I lay there limp and faint.

I could hear the muffled cries of Jerry calling my name repeatedly, but I was powerless to answer. One moment he came so near the picture that I could have thrust a hand through the canvas and touched him; then he drew away, and I could hear him descending the broad stairs in a frantic search for me.

There was fear and apprehension in his voice now.

"Nancy, dear, why don't you answer me?" he pleaded. "Tell me where you are! Shout to me! Call!"

It was pitiful to listen to his growing terror and not to be able to respond. The hand on my throat tightened every time I moved or tried to use my voice.

Finally, unable to stand the unequal combat, I sank back and gave up the struggle. Even then the

hand kept a firm grip on my throat as if the owner distrusted my sudden collapse.

Jerry's voice sounded fainter and fainter. Having failed to find me in the upper hall, he had descended to the first floor and was now frantically searching the dining-room and library for me.

When his voice became so indistinct that it sounded little louder than a whisper, my assailant stirred himself, relaxing his hold on my throat.

I thought he was relenting, and I lay perfectly still, feigning unconsciousness; but I was rudely awakened from my dream a moment later.

He had been fashioning a rude gag out of his handkerchief and a part of my skirt. The next moment it was thrust into my mouth and securely tied back of my head.

I fought furiously against this outrage, but without avail. I had not the physical strength to resist him.

HAVING securely gagged me, he picked me up in his arms and half dragged and half carried me down a narrow corridor between two walls. In a short time he snapped on his electric torch, and I could see by its flash dirty, dusty panels on either side.

It was a secret hiding place built in the house at some early period, with one exit into the upper hall through the opening behind the massive picture frame. The other end was still a mystery to me. I vaguely wondered where it led.

I had the use of my eyes and ears if not my voice, and I used them with good effect.

Jerry's voice had now died away completely. I wondered if the walls were muffling it or if he were searching for me in some distant part of the house. Rage and indignation at my captor now dominated everything else, and I was less frightened than at any previous time.

I wanted to lash out with my tongue—to tear at his eyes and hair—to kick and bite, if necessary—to punish him in true woman fashion for daring to attempt such an outrage; but with the suffocation that came from the unclean rag in my mouth I was helpless as well as speechless.

I was conscious finally of being carried down a narrow, winding stairs through a well-like inclosure that barely admitted of our passage. The sickening sensation of going down a spiral stairway that led to some unknown place aroused my fears again.

I thought of subterranean rooms and prisons, of dark tunnels that might end in the swamp, of gruesome burial places under the cellar.

I struggled mightily to free myself until he turned on me and snarled:

"Be still! You can't get away."

I wanted to speak, but I couldn't. He held me by the arms so I could not tear the gag from my mouth.

We came finally to the end of the spiral stairs into a small room without windows or doors, except the one that guarded our entrance. The man closed and locked this.

Then he dropped me unceremoniously on a hard couch and ripped the gag from my mouth.

"If you keep quiet this will stay out," he warned. "The first noise from you, back it goes."

I glared hard at him. I was unable, however, to make out his features until he lit a smoky oil lamp that swung from a side bracket on the wall.

One glance at the hard, weazened face, surmounted by a shock of thin

white hair, and I knew my first impression had been correct. It was Abner Longwood, the living replica of the portrait in the massive gold frame.

But there was no sign of blood on him; no indication that he had been stabbed or very recently near to death's door. The discovery bewildered me.

Had the man a miraculous life? Had he the power to rise after death and assume his physical shape again?

The room was so small that one could hardly pass the foot of the couch without brushing against the walls. And it was scantily furnished, with signs around that indicated it had been recently tenanted.

I glanced from the hard, mirthless face of Abner to the walls and ceilings, and then at the door he had locked.

"You can't get out of there!" he said, scowling. "It's locked, and if you did get through you couldn't escape far."

"Where are we?" I managed to articulate finally. "And what're you going to do with me?"

"Keep quiet, and you'll fare better!" he snapped out.

I could see that he was worried, that something was troubling him, and it reassured me. He knew that Jerry was in the house and would continue to search until he found my hiding place.

"You're Abner Longwood," I said after a pause. "Uncle Abner!"

He snarled and glared at me, studying my features closely with eyes that had lost none of their fierceness by age. His stare was so intense that I grew uneasy.

"Why'd you come here?" he demanded querulously. "How do I know you're Mary's child?' '

"Don't I look like mother?" I asked boldly, returning his stare with unflinching boldness.

HE DID not answer, but turned away and shuffled across the room. He pushed a small picture hanging on the wall to one side and then cautiously touched a panel of wood which moved slightly, revealing a hole no larger than the point of a lead pencil.

He applied an eye to this and remained silent for a long time.

It dawned upon me that he was looking through a peep-hole into some other room of the house. The effect on me was electrical. I sat up and watched him.

Suddenly, as if conscious of my change of attitude, he replaced the picture and whirled around. His face was livid and his eyes blazing.

"What're you looking at?" he demanded.

"At you, Uncle Abner," I replied slowly.

"What for? Look away. I ain't no pretty sight to look at."

"No," I admitted, "but I can't understand. Only a short time ago you were lying on the dining-room floor in a pool of blood—dead! Jerry said you were stone dead!"

"What does he know about it?" he snarled. "I wasn't dead."

"It seems not, but Jerry was positive you were. Now—now you don't look as if you'd been stabbed."

"Well, it's nobody's business," he grumbler surlily. "What'd you and that scamp want to come poking around here for? If you'd stayed away—stayed away——"

His tongue faltered and his mind seemed to wander. He paused and stroked his wrinkled forehead with his hand.

At that moment his age was apparent in every line of his face. His shoulders drooped and his head sagged.

There came a distant pounding and rumbling, which aroused him from his apathy. It was made by

Jerry searching for me, tearing open closet doors, pounding on the walls and making desperate efforts to solve the mystery of my disappearance. The sounds seemed to please my captor, for he grinned and rubbed his hands in glee.

"He won't find you," he muttered. "The young scamp, to come to Swamp Hollow on such a night as this! Planned to rob me, too—wanted that—that——"

He stopped and gazed at me.

"You came to find it, too, didn't you?" he sneered.

"What? The Dallas Heart?"

ALTHOUGH the thing that had caused so much trouble in the family was still a vague mystery to me, I let him think I knew all about it—as Nancy, the child of Mary Lee whom he had practically driven in disgrace from Wildwood, would have.

I could see that he had accepted me as Nancy Lee without question just as Jerry had, and the only explanation that I could give was that he had overheard our conversation through the walls. I was convinced that the peep-hole through the wall was also a listening tube, and that by applying an ear to it one could hear as well as see.

My mention of the Dallas Heart caused him to grow red and apoplectic. He raised a hand as if to strike me.

"It's gone!" he shouted. "It's lost—stolen! It's not in Swamp Hollow!"

I was almost convinced he spoke the truth, and but for his past record in deception and cruel disregard of others' rights I might have believed him. He was a little too eager, though, to convince me.

"It's not here!" he reiterated in a whining voice. "It was stolen long ago. If you'll go away and leave me alone—take that good-for-nothing nephew of mine with you—I'll—I'll release you. I want to rest and die here in peace."

There was no doubt about the last. He had lived a hermit's life in Swamp Hollow for so long that he had become inured to its loneliness, and Jerry's and my sudden appearance had upset him. I could understand that. He was a desperate old man struggling to preserve his selfish existence from outside interference.

But the tragedy, if it were a tragedy, that we had stumbled upon puzzled and troubled me. What had happened? Had he been stabbed to death and then—

No, of course that was absurd! He stood before me in perfect health! Then what had happened? The more I puzzled over it the more mysterious it appeared.

"UNCLE Abner," I said, speaking slowly, "tell me what happened before we came. I—I can't understand it!"

"What're you talking about?" he snarled. "Nothing happened!"

"Yes," I contradicted, "something terrible happened. I can see you now weltering in your own blood. You were stabbed to death on the dining-room floor."

He glared at me a moment, and then began laughing in a high, cackling voice.

"That nephew of mine told you that? He wanted to frighten you."

I shook my head slowly.

"I saw you with my own eyes," I replied.

He drew back and scowled and showed a fleeting glimpse of haunted fear in his eyes.

"It's a lie," he mumbled unconvincingly. "It's a lie. I wasn't stabbed. Nobody was stabbed. It was the storm and the night."

He stopped suddenly and whirled around upon me.

"Swamp Hollow's haunted!" he jerked out. "You know that! It's always been haunted! I've seen and heard strange things. Spirits come and go. Mebbe one of 'em fooled you—lay on the floor with a knife sticking in him."

"If it was a spirit, Uncle Abner, it was yours," I interrupted.

"That isn't so!" he snapped back sharply. "You're a little fool! If I had been stabbed to death how could I be here? Look at me! Have I any knife wounds on my body?"

He jerked open his coat and vest. There wasn't the slightest evidence that he had met with foul play—not a sign of a wound or a drop of blood on his linen. I shook my head in bewilderment.

"Then if there was no murder," I said slowly, after a pause, "why do you hold me in here? Why do you act so strangely? Why not tell Jerry so and let us both go?"

"I can't!" he cried. "That worthless scamp's after the Dallas Heart! He'd kill me to get it!"

"Then why not give it to him?" I asked boldly. "Why not let us have it? It belongs to us. Give it to us, and we'll go away."

For a moment he seemed to yield to my plea, but a second later a hard, crafty, cunning expression came into his eyes. It was the cupidity of the miser, which is past understanding—a passionate greed that stultifies all human feeling—that he showed.

CHAPTER VIII

ROTTEN WOOD

I WAS growing less afraid every minute. Faced with something tangible, I knew exactly what to expect, and the old man who held me a prisoner could not frighten me half as much as the noises of Swamp Hollow did; but at the same time my intelligence warned me not to be over-confident.

I was beginning to think that my captor was a little crazy, his mind unbalanced by too much brooding. I recalled my earlier conclusion that old men, living in the past, often suffered from an overdose of conscience and repented the sins of their youth.

I had hoped to find Abner Longwood in this condition; but I had not dreamt of finding him mentally unbalanced—a condition which is often the logical punishment nature metes out to men of his type.

Yes, the man was half crazy—not dangerously so, perhaps, but the acts of even a mild lunatic are never easy to prophesy. I decided that I would do nothing to irritate or arouse his animosity. It was my purpose to soothe and quiet him.

I watched him putter around, quiet and sad at one moment, brooding with clouded brow, and restless and irritated the next. One moment he gazed at me with lack-lustre eyes, and the next in a fierce, vengeful way.

We could still hear Jerry rambling through the big house, calling, banging and making a loud racket. I made no attempt to call out. Abner watched me sharply when the voice came near, with his fingers crooked and ready to spring at my throat if I attempted to scream.

"I'm not going to call, Uncle Abner," I said once when he crouched threateningly before me. "I'll keep quiet."

"See that you do," he rumbled. "It wouldn't do any good to shout."

"I know it wouldn't. But how long are you going to keep me here?"

"Until the young scamp goes."

This was not very satisfying, for I had an intuition that Jerry would

not leave Swamp Hollow until he found me, and I had great satisfaction in that thought. I shook my head.

"Jerry will never go," I replied. "He won't go until he finds me."

"How do you know?" he cried fiercely.

"Why, I know—or if he goes he'll come back, with help. He'll tear this house to pieces to find me. Uncle Abner," I added impressively, leaning forward, "he loves me! And when a man loves a woman he'll never desert her when she's in trouble."

"Loves you! Loves you!" he repeated sardonically. "You'd marry him—a cousin! You can't! You shan't! I won't permit it! I'd stop it!"

"Wait!" I said, checking him. "I didn't say he loved me that way. Can't he love me without wishing to marry me?"

He suddenly grew quiet and morose again, and by the way he glanced at me I knew his mind was busy and active.

"I couldn't trust you," he mumbled finally. "You know the way in here. You'd show him if I let you go."

"If I promised not to, would you let me go?" I asked eagerly.

"Yes!—No!" he replied uncertainly.

"Nancy! Nancy, for God's sake speak to me!" came Jerry's voice so clearly that we both jumped.

Abner sprang to the peep-hole, looked through it, and then closed it, shutting out the sound of the voice so that it reached us only in muffled undertones.

THE INCIDENT seemed to frighten Abner, for he began pacing the narrow room, stopping finally before me.

"Come," he said, "I'll show you the rest of this secret hiding place. It's worth exploring. It was built here so one could escape into the swamp. I'll show you the way out. Come!"

His sudden change of attitude disquieted me. Had he really decided to free me?

It was plausible that the hiding place had a secret exit into the swamp. In many ancient houses, built in the days of our early Indian wars, secret exits had been made so that the occupants could escape if threatened by fire or a raid. His words seemed fairly convincing, and I nodded.

"You'll go?" he added eagerly. "Then follow me. I'll show you the way out."

There was a possibility that he intended to thrust me out, far from the house, into the swamp where I would be lost; but even that seemed preferable to remaining his prisoner. After a second's pause I complied and rose to follow him.

I had thought that the room had no exit except the stairs and through the opening in the wall back of the picture; but I was soon to be enlightened. Abner Longwood stepped back and moved his hand up and down the paneled wall as if searching for something.

Suddenly, to my surprise, there was a clicking noise almost at my very feet, and a trap-door in the floor swung upward, revealing another pair of stairs. I stared in amazement, surprise and curiosity in my eyes.

"We'll go down it," he whispered. "It will take us into the swamp."

He thrust his electric light into the yawning opening and motioned for me to proceed; but I drew back in fright.

"You go first," I whispered.

He paused for a second, and then mumbled something under his

breath. He watched me as a cat watches a mouse, but I made no move to trick him. The moment he was safely on the ladder I followed. He would not proceed further until one of my feet was on the top rung.

We descended in this way step by step. An unpleasant odor came from below, damp and musty, and I shivered.

It was a short descent, not more than ten feet. At the bottom we came into a room that seemed to be a part of the cellar under the house. I was so sure of this that I asked in a whisper:

"Is this the cellar?'

He nodded and threw the rays of light around for me to see. If it was the cellar it was a small one for such a large house as Swamp Hollow, and I began to doubt if it really was a cellar. I began poking around in the dark corners, sniffing and listening.

There was nothing in the place but a few old barrels and boxes, with piles of old rags and litter swept into the corners. It was foul and musty, with the dampness oozing from the stone foundation in little globules of sweat.

SUDDENLY the light went out and I was left in total darkness. I gave a great start and cried:

"Where's the light, Uncle Abner? Where are you?"

I heard the stealthy tread of his feet, a sharp click as if a foot had come in contact with a stone, and then by the aid of the dim light from above I saw Abner Longwood crawling up the ladder. With a cry of fear, I groped for the first rung and tried to follow him.

It dawned upon me in a flash that he had tricked me, enticed me into the dark cellar where I would be safely out of his way. I screamed again and clutched at his foot; but he was too quick for me, and climbed out of the place and closed the trapdoor with a click.

I was in total darkness, and for a time I was too terrified to scream or act. The dastardly trick of the man seemed to paralyze my mind and tongue. He had deliberately lured me into the underground place to hold me a prisoner.

How long he would keep me there I could only conjecture. Certainly until he had got rid of Jerry.

"Jerry! Jerry!" I shrieked then, recovering the use of my voice.

But I might have saved my strength. Jerry was far away, and my voice could not reach him. I blamed myself then for not screaming when only a thin partition had separated us. There might have been hope of rescue then. There was little or none now.

The place was absolutely dark, and I huddled at the foot of the ladder in terror. Was the man crazy? Would he leave me there to starve or die of fright, or would he return in time and release me?

The situation was so appalling and desperate that I became numb with horror, and for a long time I could do nothing but call Jerry and sob aloud.

Not a sound came from above. If the owner of Swamp Hollow heard he was indifferent to my pleas.

Gaining a little self-control, I finally crawled up the ladder until my hand came in contact with the trapdoor. I pushed against it with all my might, but it did not yield.

It creaked and rasped a little, and a ray of hope came to me. The hinges were rusty from age and long disuse, while the wood itself was rotten and soft in places.

With trembling fingers I examined the hinges, poking at them until my nails were broken. Yes, they were rusty, and the wood was rotten with

age. If a man were imprisoned there—Jerry, for instance—what would he do? I asked myself this question, and then proceeded to answer it with acts.

The only implement I had was a small nail file, one of those dainty silver things that come with manicure sets. It belonged to the little vanity case that I always carried with me. It was so fragile and small that I was almost afraid it would break if used for any purpose other than that for which it had been made.

Still I was desperate. I had to do something. I could not sit there and wait for release that might never come.

I thought of Jerry, and began picking cautiously at the hinges. But rusted as they were, they were still stout enough to resist anything I could do; but the wood was soft and rotten.

I attacked this, picking and digging small splinters around the hinge nearest me. Once my file sunk its full length into the wood. I gave a start and breathed more easily. The wood in places was little more than punk.

How my heart beat with hope and fear! If I could once get out of the place I would take my chances in a struggle with the old man. That was better than starving down there in the cellar.

I worked feverishly, picking and digging at the rotten wood with nail file and fingers. A sudden tinkling noise startled me, and I held my breath a moment. Then I expelled it with a faint cry of joy. One of the screws had been loosened and dropped out.

I do not know how long I scraped and dug and picked at first one hinge and then at the other, but it seemed ages to me.

I was cramped in my awkward position, and my body and limbs ached. But I was too desperate to give heed to anything but the necessity for accomplishing my purpose.

Another screw came loose, and I managed to pick it out with my nail file. It gave me a thrill as few things in my life had done. It was a milestone in my progress toward freedom.

Abner Longwood had made no noise above, and sometimes I wondered what he was doing or what new diabolical trap he might be preparing in case I should work myself out of the underground dungeon.

Would he wait for me and then crack me on the head with some instrument, toppling me back into the hole to break my neck in the fall? This had to be considered, and as I silently worked away at my desperate task I tried to plan what I should do.

I would not immediately thrust my head up once the door was lifted from its hinges. I would play cautiously, ducking back into the hole until Abner betrayed his presence. He would have the advantage, working from above with a searchlight.

Yes, I would be decidedly in a dangerous position, but even that was better than rotting in the cellar.

I had dug the hinges half out of the rotten wood when I decided it was time to see if I could force the door. I braced myself on a rung of the ladder, and bent my head so that the pressure would come partly on my shoulders. I slowly straightened my body, pushing upward with increasing force.

I was disappointed when nothing happened. Not even a creak of the door or hinges greeted my ears. Was the thing held fast by bolts? Or was Abner sitting on it so that even if the hinges fell off I could not budge it?

This thought was disheartening. It explained the reason for my failure to move it.

Half in anger and half in the hope that I could break through, I straightened my body and exerted all the upward pressure possible. There was a moment of silence, a desperate moment of fear and uncertainty, and then something gave way. And with a crash the door opened, nearly catapulting me through the opening. I had to clutch at the sides to save himself from falling back into the hole.

CLINGING precariously to my support, I hung there, momentarily expecting a blow on the head; but it did not come. And when I looked up I saw by the dim light from the lamp that I was in no immediate danger.

Abner was not crouching there, waiting for me. A quick glance around the small room showed me further that he was not in it.

With a little gasp of relief I climbed out and stood a moment, wild-eyed and expectant, waiting for his appearance. The door leading to the spiral stairs above was open. Was he crouching behind it or lurking on the dark stairs to catch me unawares?

All the cunning and caution of a trapped animal came to me, and I crossed the room to take a station as far from the open trap-door as possible. There I waited and listened in breathless silence. I stood behind a chair, grasping its back for support, also with the intention of using it for a weapon of self-defence.

The silence of the room was oppressive, and in time it got on my nerves. Not a sound reached my ears, and my own breathing seemed to be the only thing that disturbed the tomb-like stillness.

Could it be that Abner Longwood had fled, leaving the place, confident that he had me safely imprisoned below? Such an idea made me wild to rush up the stairs and fling myself out of the secret hole into the main upper hall of the house.

Jerry would be somewhere around. Once by his side I would be safe.

Encouraged by the thought I began edging toward the door, and when I reached it I peered up the spiral stairs. The lower part was bathed in the light from the lamp, but the upper part was in gloom.

Dared I risk it? Was Abner lurking at the head of the stairs waiting for me?

For a long time I could not muster the courage to act. Then I calmed my beating heart, clutched at my dress with both hands, and started swiftly for the stairs, rushing up them for fear I might weaken and change my mind before gaining the top.

They were steep and narrow, with no railing on either side for support, but I climbed them swiftly. On the top step I paused and caught my breath with a gasp.

The huge frame containing the portrait was swung back, revealing the hall beyond. And in the opening stood Abner Longwood, peering out and listening!

CHAPTER IX

THE END OF THE PICTURE

THE sight of my enemy blocking the mouth of the opening behind the picture, his body filling the whole space, was like a dash of cold water in the face.

For a few seconds I wavered between panicky fear and bold defiance. If I retreated he might corner me and hold me in his power again; but the same result might follow if I rushed upon him and tried to fight my way past him. He was a strong

man in spite of his age, and quick and supple of limb, as I had discovered to my sorrow.

He was standing at the entrance, and the picture was partly swung back on its hinges. He was watching and listening for something in the hall.

His absorption had been so great that he had not heard me coming, and fortunately he was still ignorant of my presence. This gave me time to recover my breath and still the loud beating of my heart.

I watched him narrowly, measuring the distance between us, and once when he made a motion as if to withdraw I ducked my head and and actually crouched for a football tackle against his legs; but a noise outside in the hall drew his attention back.

I heard the noise too. It was made by Jerry. He was coming up the stairs and, from the racket, I knew that he was not trying to deaden his footsteps or conceal his movements.

On the contrary, he was shuffling along, growling and grumbling and pounding on the wall, pausing now and then to call my name, but in a less vociferous voice than before. There was despair and discouragement in it.

My heart almost leaped in my throat, and with difficulty I restrained myself from shouting back; but caution warned me to keep quiet until he came nearer, and I crouched and waited expectantly for the moment when I could safely rush past Abner Longwood. With Jerry near to help I need not fear the result of the struggle.

But one thing I had not figured upon, and this neglect got me into immediate trouble. I should have known that Abner would not stand there in full view until Jerry came in sight. He knew of his approach, and was watching him stealthily. When freedom seemed near he stepped back, and the mammoth picture began swinging noiselessly in position, concealing the entrance as effectually as if it had never been.

It happened so suddenly and unexpectedly that my way to freedom was blocked before I realized what was happening. I had been so confident that Jerry would soon rescue me that the reaction was terrible.

I gave a scream and rushed blindly forward. Abner was so startled that he lost his usual quick presence of mind. He recoiled as if attacked by a ghost.

I pushed him aside in my rush and tried to stop the huge panel from closing, but before I could interfere it snapped into position with a gentle click.

I was shut in, with total darkness around me. But my scream had reached Jerry's ears. I heard him rushing down the hall, shouting:

"Nancy! Nancy! Where are you? Speak! Shout again!"

Abner heard him, too, and the sound brought him to his senses. I felt rather than heard him creeping toward me.

The terror of having those bony fingers clutching my throat again, choking me into submission, moved me to desperation. I drew back and cried for help at the top of my voice.

My screams enabled Abner to locate me, for the next moment his hand touched my arm and tried to close upon it. I jerked away just in time and crouched at the foot of the opposite wall.

The passage was so narrow that I could not hope to elude him long, unless I fled back down the spiral stairs; and that I would not do, for Jerry was near, and I would not leave him again.

I waited breathlessly, holding back

my voice now, listening and watching, expecting any moment to feel the bony fingers seeking me out in the darkness.

Jerry continued to shout, running up and down the hall frantically, but Abner and I played our game silently. I knew he was waiting to locate me by my movements or breathing, and to balk him I held my breath and crouched in silence.

The seconds seemed like minutes. I could not hold my breath a moment longer, and as I expelled it with a huge sigh there came a quick, cat-like movement toward me.

Frightened almost out of my wits, I gave a tremendous spring, leaping up in the air and holding both arms before me to fend off the man's attack.

It was the act of a desperate woman. I did not know whether I leaped ahead or sideways. I had no time to consider direction and besides, in the darkness, I was all turned around and could not tell whether I was retreating toward the stairs or advancing toward the mouth of the passage.

THE RESULT was somewhat astounding to me. My hands came in contact with something hard but yielding and then, as my body catapulted through it, a sharp, rending, tearing sound mystified me. I seemed to be jumping through something that split and tore like stiff paper.

I was too bewildered to realize that I had jumped straight through the oil painting that blocked the mouth of the secret corridor, ripping and tearing the aged canvas with my arms and body and demolishing the panel for all time.

I was not even aware of what had really happened until I landed plump in the arms of Jerry on the other side, knocking his electric torch from his hand and surprising him so that he gasped and spluttered several times before speaking.

Then as his arms closed about me, and he realized that he had me in them, he burst forth into an ecstasy of joy.

"Nancy! Nancy! I've found you at last! Thank God I have you!"

As each word was punctuated by a kiss and a violent squeeze, I became too confused to reply. But I clung to him with both arms. Nothing short of a derrick, I thought, could tear me away from him.

"You poor dear!" he said. "Where have you been? You've frightened me out of my wits? What's happened? Why didn't you call to me before?"

I suddenly thought of Abner. Would he attempt to strike Jerry down in the darkness? In his rage he might do anything.

"The light, Jerry!" I shrieked. "Get your light! Quick!"

I tore myself loose from his embrace and made a grab for the torch that had rolled half across the hall. Fortunately, it had not been broken in the fall. It was still throwing a dazzling path of light, but not in the direction of the danger.

I SEIZED it and swung it full upon the portrait. I was none too soon.

The canvas portrait of Abner Longwood had been torn in half, ripped and shredded beyond recognition; but standing in the hole, leaning toward Jerry with an uplifted table knife, a malignant look of hatred on his face, was the man who had caused all my trouble. Jerry's back was turned to him, and his neck was within a few feet of the deadly weapon.

"Jump, Jerry!" I screamed. "Jump!"

The warning was just in time. He whirled as the knife began descending. Abner nearly lost his

balance in trying to check himself. Jerry had ample time to reach out and capture him, but he stood and stared in awe.

I did not realize it at that time, but he was so startled by what seemed to him a miracle that he could not act or speak. With good reason, it seemed to him that the oil portrait of his uncle had suddenly come to life and was leaning forward to strike him. The result of his hesitation was disastrous.

Abner recovered his balance, glared a second at us, and then, with a snarl of rage, hurled the knife at Jerry. Fortunately, though, he missed him by a few inches, and turned and rushed back into the secret corridor.

Even when he had vanished Jerry stood spellbound, winking and blinking. The whole thing had startled and bewildered him.

"Oh, you've let him get away!" I wailed. "Why didn't you catch him?"

That brought him to his senses. "It's Uncle!" he exclaimed, as if he had not realized it before. "It wasn't his ghost or—or that portrait!"

"No, it's Abner in blood and flesh!" I cried. "And he tried to kill you and me! Oh, Jerry!" I added, shuddering and covering my eyes, the reaction from the strain now making me weak and shaky.

"Tried to kill you!" Jerry exclaimed, jumping to my side. "Then I'll——"

He snatched the flashlight from my hand and jumped through the split canvas into the opening. Realizing when it was too late that my words had inflamed him, I called to him.

"No! No, Jerry! Come back! Come back!"

BUT my pleas might have been addressed to the air. I doubt if Jerry ever heard them. If he did, he ignored them.

I saw him dash down the corridor and disappear. Weak and helpless, I stood a moment unable to act, and then I followed.

I didn't want Jerry to commit murder—not for my sake or his—and I knew that murder was in his eyes. All the wrongs that his uncle had committed against him and his family in the past came to a dramatic climax at that moment, turning him into an irresponsible avenger seeking the blood of another.

"Jerry! Jerry!" I cried, running after him. "Come back, please!"

I scrambled through the split canvas and staggered down the dark corridor. I came to the head of the spiral stairs and halted.

Everything was quiet below. Jerry was down there, for I could see the flash of his light. A sickening feeling that he had accomplished his deadly purpose seized me.

"Jerry!" I called weakly.

"It's all right, Nancy!" he replied.

I waited for him to explain, and when he did not I asked: "Where's Abner?"

"Dead!" was the solemn answer.

I shivered and let out a little moan. I had been too late. I was partly responsible for the murder of his uncle by inflaming his mind with my words. Henceforth, Jerry would carry the brand of a murderer around with him, no matter if the courts did exonerate him for the deed.

I began weeping, sobbing aloud, so that Jerry heard me. He came up the stairs to my side.

"Don't cry, Nancy," he soothed. "He isn't worth it. Of course, death's always a little terrifying, but Abner deserved it. It was a quick and good end."

"But you, Jerry," I sobbed. "It's

you I'm thinking of. Oh, and I was partly responsible!"

He stared at me a moment, and then blurted out:

"I don't see that. What had you to do with it, Nancy?"

"I—I told you he tried to kill me, and that—that aroused you."

I stopped and looked him squarely in the face.

"If they arrest you they must arrest me," I added resolutely. "I was as much to blame as you, and I'll go to prison or—or—anywhere else with you."

My eyes did not flinch when he stared at me—not even when he took a hand and held it.

"What do you mean, Nancy?" he stammered. "Prison! Who's going to prison? What for, I'd like to know?"

"Why — why — for killing—Uncle Abner," I faltered, feeling suddenly that there had been a mistake, and that I was making myself ridiculous.

A moment later I was convinced of this when Jerry's eyes twinkled and his lips wrinkled at the corners.

"For killing Uncle Abner!" he repeated.

Then he began to chuckle. "Say, Nancy, this is the second or third time you've accused me of murder, or hinted at it. Do I look like such a blood-thirsty monster?"

"But — but——" I stammered, glancing down at the huddled figure at the foot of the stairs. "How was he killed if—if——"

"—if I didn't kill him? Well, Nancy, he was in such a hurry to get away that he stumbled and fell down those stairs headfirst. He broke his neck when he hit the bottom."

"Oh!" I gasped with relief, seizing his arm. "Oh, I'm so glad!"

"So glad I'm not a murderer? Well, that's something to be thankful for!"

HE LOOKED at me quizzically, and in spite of the solemnity of the whole affair I blushed and laughed with him.

"Forgive me, Jerry!" I pleaded. "I've been through so much that my nerves are all unstrung. I hardly know what I say or do."

"Perhaps you didn't mean it then when you said you'd go to prison, or anywhere else with me," he pursued relentlessly. "Did you?"

I hesitated a minute and then nodded.

"Yes, I meant it."

"Then——"

I moved away when he tried to put an arm around me.

"Jerry," I added, "this whole night has been a terrible nightmare. Did you know of this secret passage behind the picture?"

"No! If I had I'd have hunted for you in it. But tell me how you got in here. Tell me all that's happened since I lost you. I've been crazy. I was going to tear the whole house down to find you. Nancy, dear, I never spent such a horrible night in my life."

In as few sentences as possible I related the whole harrowing series of events that had driven me nearly insane with fear.

Jerry was a poor listener. Several times he interrupted with words and looked down at poor old Abner Longwood's body with glowing eyes.

When I came to that part in which Abner had imprisoned me in the cellar, Jerry burst out angrily:

"I'm glad he's dead! I can't feel any other way. He's done enough harm in the world. If he were alive I'd kill him—yes, Nancy, I'd really commit murder, I think."

"Then I'm glad he's gone, Jerry," I smiled, "for I wouldn't have your hands stained with his blood for anything."

He held up his hands and looked

at them. A smile creased his lips.

"I'm not sure," he remarked, "that they've not been already stained with his blood, Nancy."

I asked him what he meant, and he hesitated some time before answering.

"I guess I lied to you in the swamp," he said. "That blood on my sleeve and hands was Uncle Abner's. I didn't like to tell you before. It wasn't pleasant. I thought you wouldn't understand, but now——"

He paused a second, and then went on:

"When I came to Swamp Hollow early in the evening, I found Uncle Abner dying from a stab wound. I caught him just as he fell. I thought he had killed himself.

"Before he died I wanted the truth about the Dallas Heart. I asked him to tell me where it was. I pleaded with him, but I couldn't get a word from him. He was the same old Abner.

"He may have been weaker than I thought from loss of blood. Perhaps he wasn't able to speak. I don't know. I got angry and shook him."

He paused, but continued slowly a moment later.

"He died in my arms, and when I lowered him to the floor my hands and sleeve were covered with his blood. That's the truth, Nancy, but I might have hard work proving it in court if I were arrested for his murder. Anyway, I got frightened after that, and fled into the swamp."

(*To be Concluded*)

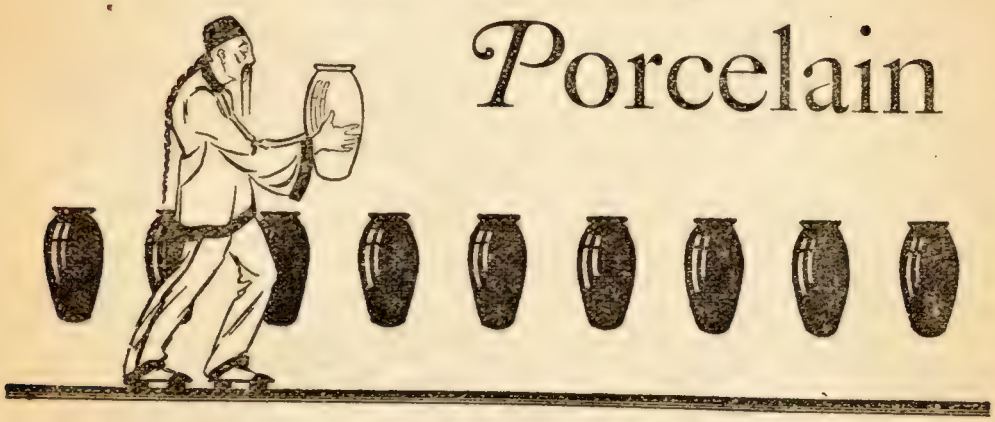
Most Unusual

Draupadi, the daughter of a King of Hindustan, was destined to become the wife of five brothers, all princes of the realm. She was the most beautiful woman in the world, and all the Rajahs of India came to the tournament at which she was to be offered as a prize to the bravest and best of them. Arjuna, the third of five brothers, won her by skill in archery. He told his mother he had won a prize, without specifying what it was. She answered that he must divide it with his brothers. As to disobey the orders of a mother in such circumstances was to incur the wrath of the gods, this answer created great dismay, and the five brothers laid the case before Vyasa, a wise old sage of that period.

Vyasa declared that Draupadi was the incarnation of a maiden lady who had offered five sacrifices to the god, Shiva, in order to obtain a husband. Shiva informed her that she could not have a husband in this life, but that in the next she should have one for each of her sacrifices. In vain the lady assured the god that she did not want five husbands in her next life, she only wanted one in her present life.

However, in the case of Draupadi, the order was simply reversed, and in the course of time she became the wife of the five Pandu brothers.

Pale Pink Porcelain



By FRANK OWEN

TSANG KEE FOO was an artist in porcelain. His house in Kingtehchen, the Porcelain Capital of China, was filled with exquisite specimens of porcelain art that no museum could surpass.

The family of Tsang Kee Foo had all been potters, dating back for almost a thousand years. Somewhere a book is written on the lineage of this renowned artist, though trace of it has been lost. Perhaps some day it will be located and much data about this ancient family will be given to the world.

Tsang Kee Foo was tall and slim and round-shouldered from constantly stooping over his wheel. His face, colorless and bleached, looked as though it had been dried by the furnaces that baked his delicate porcelains. He was superbly well-educated, a profund linguist and efficient in all the supreme literatures of the world.

One of his ambitions was to translate the musings of Long Chik, the poet, into pottery. For each quatrain a vase, an urn or a traced-bowl. He believed in the posibility of his desire, since all arts are interchangeable.

It was his knowledge of quaint tales and folklore that gave Tsang Kee Foo his charming personality. What mattered that he was cold and ruthless, that he could pass starving children on the streets without as much as a glance, or that he permitted his own sister to die of want simply because once in her youth she had criticised his handiwork?

The face of Tsang Kee Foo was a mask, a smiling mask, and few there were who knew the mind that lived behind it.

He was successful, rich—an artist. It was enough.

NOW as he sat at the door of his house he felt great contentment. He was snatching a moment's rest for his family from the ceaseless toil

that had gone on for almost a thousand years.

Listlessly he watched the coolies trotting past, laden down with porcelain-ware which they were taking to the furnaces to be baked. Not many factories in Kingtehchen could boast furnaces. For most of the pottery was made in the homes of the people.

Almost every house was a factory. And even tiny children were skilled in the ceramic art.

But Tsang Kee Foo was rich. He had his own furnaces for baking. Life was very good.

In this he eclipsed Lu Chau, his greatest rival. Lu Chau was equally as skillful, but he did not own his own furnace. Tsang Kee Foo hated Lu Chau though he always greeted him with a smile and welcomed him to his home.

In cordiality he treated him as a brother. Yet deep within him was buried a burning hatred, a hatred that burned as surely as the pine-wood in his furnaces.

For one thing, Lu Chau was handsome. He was possessed of a beauty that made all women his slaves. They looked up into his black almond eyes, into his face which was like a full moon, and listened to the flattery that dripped ever from his lips. And at once they were lost in a surging sea of desire. Lu Chau's attraction for women was as famous as his fine porcelains.

In ordinary circumstances Tsang Kee Foo would not have cared for the talk which Lu Chau caused, were it not that Lu Chau was infatuated with the lovely Mei-Mei, a China girl as gorgeous as any bit of porcelain.

That poet of old must have been thinking of Mei-Mei when he wrote:

"Her voice makes perfume when she speaks,
Her breath is music faint and low."

THE LOVELY Mei-Mei was a product of porcelain even as were Tsang Kee Foo and Lu Chau. The very foundation of her family, of her house, was built on porcelain.

But she paid no attention whatever to the modeling of cups and vases. Her concern was solely with the painting of them. Most of her vases were decorated with Yunnan blue and yellow, though other colors also were used upon occasion.

Mei-Mei ground all her own colors from rock crystals, arsenic, copper, lead and pewter. No colorist was ever more adept than she. Her creations were justly famous.

It was said that she infused her personality into her creations. Each bit of pottery reflected her mood. When she was melancholy, so was the jar. When love, desire or laughter enveloped her it found reflection in her work.

Whether all the quaint tales that were recounted about her were true or not, they served to emphasize her popularity. If all the great artists of China were put down, the name of Mei-Mei would have to be among them.

With all her colors she was satisfied, with the sole exception of pink. The pale pink color which she desired was hard to locate. There were many types of red, but not the elusive pink for which she had sought in vain for years.

LU CHAU wooed her with vast enthusiasm. He was always smiling.

"Forever I will stand guard over you," he declared, "like an old gingko tree, if you will but pause to listen to my voice. Marry me and I will fashion wondrous pottery for you to paint.'"

Tsang Kee Foo was equally as vehement in his wooing. He quoted to her all the love songs of the poets.

He brought flowers to her of rare elegance.

"When we are wed," he declared, "life thereafter will be but one superb poem of loveliness. Greater than Kutani-ware is the porcelain of Mei-Mei, and greater than the love of any other is my love for you.

"It is like an endless lyric poem, or a brook that flows on forever through the ages. When the sun ceases to rise yellow over China, then only will fade my devotion."

Mei-Mei smiled. She sang softly to herself as she worked at her art. She was decorating a vase with ivory-white and mirror-black. Close beside her was one of great beauty in celadin.

"Who first brings to me the secret of the pale pink color that I crave," she murmured, "to him will I surrender and to none other.

"Marriage at best is a subjection of womanhood and I can only submit to it if my reward does justify. Love is a poem—but poems can be repeated to many people.

"My love is a color, pale pink like the blush of the morning, pink like the cheek of a happy woman, pink like the sky when day is dying. Your reward will be great if you win me; mine must be great by proportion."

TSANG KEE FOO returned to his house. He locked himself in his workroom for days, seeking the secret of that wondrous color. His enthusiasm was great, but no greater than that of Lu Chau, even though Lu Chau was not so adept at concentration.

While pining for the wondrous Mei-Mei he was not blind to the charms of other women. He studied profoundly, but his amours were in like proportion.

Frequently he stopped at the home of Tsang Kee Foo. He was extremely polite, but the essence of politeness he affected did not dull the edge of his cynicism.

He angered Tsang Kee Foo to an acute degree by assuming that in the end he himself would win the prize. All women were as flowers that bent to every breeze and the love of Lu Chau was as subtle as wind sighing through willows.

He walked about the rooms of Tsang Kee Foo, fingering his porcelains, eulogizing on their perfection and beauty. Occasionally he drew attention to a slight defect in one. At other times he was loud in his praise.

But the porcelains he praised were always the ones Tsang Kee Foo had not wrought, while those in which he detected defects were always the works of his friend.

This goaded Tsang Kee Foo to great fury. But there was nothing in his bland expression that reflected his inward turbulence. He knew that he was a far better artist than Lu Chan, except in one thing—the frailities of women.

"Women," reflected Lu Chau, "are much like porcelain; a single flaw and they are worthless."

He was perfectly complacent. He was handsome and he knew it. China girls loved to gaze upon his moon-like face. His kisses were valued.

In love, he was supreme. The ceramic art was only secondary. Every other art was subordinate to love.

Some day he would marry Mei-Mei. The future was pleasant to contemplate. Not for a moment did he question his ultimate success. Lu Chau did not fail in love.

It enervated his spirits to talk to Tsang Kee Foo. He was a rival to be derided, not to be feared. What woman could fail to chose Lu Chau, given the choice between them?

He handled the cups, the bowls and the vases carefully. Tsang Kee Foo was an artist, a ceramic-artist, not a love-artist. He was eloquent, his words were honeyed, but his face was like a bleached, dried lime.

MEANWHILE Tsang Kee Foo sat and gazed up toward the lantern above his head. He made no rejoinder to Lu Chau's witticisms, except an occasional grunt. He reclined seemingly at ease upon a divan.

But there was no rest in his mind. He could be patient. Ultimately his time would come.

The baking furnaces of Tsang Kee Foo were in a spearate house at the foot of his garden. There all the splendid potteries that had brought renown to him were baked.

It was one of the few private furnaces in Kingtehchen. Even Lu Chau with all his swagger had no furnace. He was forced to send his wares through the crowded streets with all the other throngs of potters.

Lu Chau was handsome, successful with women; but he had no bake ovens He was simply one of the common horde.

Tsang Kee Foo smiled. There was more provocation for mirth in the thought than in any of the witticisms of Lu Chau.

"Now we are rivals," mused Tsang Kee Foo. "Perhaps one of us will attain to the hand of Mei-Mei. And because I wish to put no obstacle in your way I offer to you the privilege of using my bake-ovens for your experiments.

"Let us be rivals, but not enemies. If it comes to pass that you discover the pale pink color before I do, then will I bow my head and pray to the spirits and the dragons to bestow happiness upon you and to guard your footsteps well."

Lu Chau was surprised. He arched his eyebrows.

"You speak in a manner befitting a great artist," he commented, "and I will accept your kind offer. It would indeed be a crime to refuse a suggestion coming from a heart so overflowing with bounty.

"Let me then be less than the least coolie in your household. If I offend by being in your shop too often have me cast from your door."

Tsang Kee Foo smiled. He blinked his eyes as though the light were strong—the light, perhaps, of his own benevolence.

"And now," he said, "I will take you to the rear of my garden to inspect my furnaces. They are not perfect, but they are adequate. Such as they are, I offer them to you."

Together they strolled out into the garden.

THE AIR struck their faces delightfully cool. The sun was a yellow maze. It poured down in golden splendor on the lilacs and peonies, on the pink oleanders and lotuses that sweetened the air.

About the walks were stately trees, Chinese ash and scented pine. The air was as fragrant as the spice-laden air of Cambodia. Beneath the trees several stone benches beckoned one to loiter.

It made incongruous the fact that at the foot of the garden were the furnaces of intense heat in which pottery was baked. The pine fires were never out. They continued onward as surely as the moon.

In this same spot the family of Tsang Kee Foo had flourished for a thousand years, had clung tenaciously to life through famine and flood, through pestilence and death. There was something admirable about it, something superb.

Tsang Kee Foo opened the door of his shop and bade Lu Chau to

enter. He was very polite, very formal. No race can match the Chinese in courtesy, no Chinaman could eclipse Tsang Kee Foo, poet and potter and lover of Mei-Mei.

At one end of the shop was the great door that led to the bake-ovens. Lu Chau walked close to it. His interest was sincere. Cupidity lighted up his eyes. He was to receive the use of these ovens free.

Tsang Kee Foo opened the great door. The blast that came from the oven was like that of a swirling volcano.

"I have a dozen vases baking within at the present time," he said, "but there is room for very many more. Stand closer so that you can appreciate its capacity."

Lu Chau stepped forward that he might peer with greater intensity. As he did so Tsang Kee Foo caught him about the waist and pushed him into the oven. The shriek which Lu Chau emitted was drowned as the great iron door swung shut.

WITHOUT haste or trepidation Tsang Kee Foo returned to his garden. The air was fragrant with lotuses.

He plucked a carnation from a bush and touched it to his nostrils. Never, he thought, had the wistaria blossoms appeared to greater advantage.

He seated himself upon a bench near a willow tree. His soul was filled with poetry. Quatrains like jewels were chasing themselves through his consciousness.

He thought of the lovely Mei-Mei. When they were wed it would be an excellent triumph for the art of ceramics. What wondrous vases they would be able to create together.

He listlessly picked up a ripe pomegranate that had fallen to the ground. Love was as delicious as the seeds of that luscious fruit, sweeter than honey and almonds, or sandalwood and myrrh.

Now Lu Chau would bother him no more. No longer would he be forced to bear the bite of his sarcasms, of his boastings, nor to listen to the quaint tales he told of amorous Chinese maidens who could not resist his allure. The future had taken on a rosy hue, somewhat akin to that pale pink color of Chinese porcelain for which Mei-Mei yearned.

Until the moon rose that night he remained in his garden, until the soft flush of sunset had blended into the purpling folds of night. The scent of lotuses sweetened, the breeze intensified, the stars bloomed out like wondrous lanterns hanging in the sky. The world was suffused in a riot of beauty.

Tsang Kee Foo rose to his feet. He sang wildly in his ecstasy. He crooned love songs to the moon.

Even unto dawn he remained in his garden. For his eyes there was no sleep. He wished simply to breathe in that perfume of joy forever. He refreshed his face by crushing it into a large wild rose on which the cool night dew was heavy.

WHEN the hour of noon approached he went to the studio of Mei-Mei. He bowed low as he entered, arrayed in the costliest of his satin costumes.

"Surely," he cried, "I must be permanently protected from hardship and danger by a Spirit Screen. Beloved am I of the gods, for in all this universe I am the one appointed to gain the love of Mei-Mei."

As he spoke he drew from his cloak a vase, exquisite in workmanship and of a soft, pale, pink color that surpassed in splendor the glory of dawn or the cheek of a lovely woman.

Mei-Mei uttered a little cry as she seized the vase and fell upon her knees to study more easily its elu-

sive color. Her eyes were of dazzling brightness and her heart beat with supreme excitement. It was that immortal hour for which she had waited years.

Tsang Kee Foo stood beside her, as majestic as a gingko tree. He did not tell her that Lu Chau existed no longer, that his blood had colored the vase.

He could not explain how the miracle had come to pass, nor did he try to. It was sufficient that the vase was pink.

He had offered Lu Chau the use of his ovens. Lu Chau had rewarded him for his generosity.

At last Mei-Mei rose to her feet.

"It is the color," she whispered. "Nowhere else have I beheld it, except in the necklace of peculiar workmanship which Lu Chau always wore about his neck. When he returns I will marry you, even as my word was given. But I cannot do so until Lu Chau admits that I have kept faith.

"Lu Chau is a cultured gentleman. I know that he will accept defeat gracefully."

The Lady in Brown

Captain Marryat, the writer of sea stories, once tried the effect of a pistol on a ghost. Near his estate was Rayham Hall, residence of Sir Charles Townsend, who had lately succeeded. Guests coming to visit the new owner began to make excuses to cut their stay short, and it was alleged that the original of the portrait of a lady in a brown robe, which hung in one of the bedrooms, had been seen in the long corridors. The baronet asked Marryat's aid, and the writer, who was a magistrate, thought smugglers or poachers, of which there were plenty in the district, were trying to frighten the baronet out of his home, with the idea of turning it into a rendezvous. Marryat slept a couple of nights in the bedroom of the portrait, with a loaded pistol, but was undisturbed. On the third night, however, two other guests dropped in as he was undressing and invited him to go and look at a new gun just received from London. Marryat agreed, and jokingly took his pistol in case they ran into the Lady in Brown. The corridor was long and dark and all lights out. Half-way along it they saw the glimmer of a light advancing from the other end. Thinking it might be a maid or some of the ladies of the party, the three men, who were in a state of undress, slipped into a deep doorway. Marryat saw the light come closer, and to his horror recognized the Lady in Brown. She deliberately stopped in front of where the men stood, holding a lighted lamp up to her face with a leering grin. Marryat fired point blank, and the figure vanished instantaneously, lamp and all, leaving the three men shaken by the experience. The figure was seen many times by a number of people of credibility.

West India Lights

By HENRY S. WHITEHEAD

A Complete Novelette

Under the changing WEST INDIA LIGHTS a little, painted manikin atones for a crime de coeur in a most unusual manner. This tale of Henry S. Whitehead's suggests subtly the devil magic of the Black People and the restrained emotions of the Old Scottish Gentry.

CHAPTER I

THE PORTRAIT

I HAD engaged Melbourne House, a fine old mansion on the hill back of Fredericksted on the West India Island of Santa Cruz, for the winter. And I found when I arrived one November day that I was to have one more room at my disposal than I had bargained for. This was, really, an end of the second-floor passageway, which had been made into a room by a slat-partition.

My landlady, Old Mistress James Desmond, had had moved out certain articles of decrepit furniture for the housing of which I had agreed to give up the use of that "room," which looked like an old-fashioned wine-closet.

I bestowed my trunks and packing cases on its floor and had Esmerelda, my coal-black servant, clear off the shelves for hand-lugggage and odds and ends.

In order to do so Esmerelda had to move several discarded belongings which had been left there, and among these was a large, old-fashioned picture in a heavy wooden frame which had escaped the ravages of wood-worms for countless decades. I noticed the old picture when I was bestowing some of my own odds and ends near where it stood, and carried it into my workroom to have a look at it.

At first I had thought it was a chromo. But this was no chromo, olio, nor anything mechanically produced. It was paint.

I looked at it closely, with interest. The composition was amateurish. The coloring was too faded with the dimness of years for me to make much of it.

I carried the painting into the bathroom, made a lather and, after taking the ancient and brittle canvas out of its frame, began to clean it with soap and water. I dried it, and then used a little typewriter oil on it.

The colors began to jump out at me. The artist had been, plainly, a lover of color. My restoration accentuated the amateurishness of the thing, but I forgave the artist much because of the subject he—or she—had chosen.

My imaginary young lady in her flowered muslin dress of a century ago had chosen to depict the execution of a pirate, and—the pirate could have been none other than Fawcett.

There could be no doubt about it whatever. That bloody villain was the only pirate that had been executed at St. Thomas'—except his own two mates who had paid the penalty of their murderous rascality at the same time—and this was a picture of St. Thomas, painted photographically, apparently from the deck of some vessel conveniently anchored offshore.

The costumes, too, were of Fawcett's period. His execution had taken place in September, 1824, and that, too, fixed the period of the painting.

High as the colors were pitched, stilted as were the many characters, there was something convincingly lifelike about the thing. Apparently this picture had been painted from actual observation.

The colors too, on reflection, were not so much exaggerated. Did not one do well here to wear smoked glasses in the middle of the day? Was not the glowing indigo of the Caribbean incredible—the scarlet of the hibiscus painful to the unaccustomed eye?

I fastened up the canvas with carpet tacks on the wall of my workroom where it would catch the North light. I began at its upper corners, pressing tacks along its upper edge, and then, pulling it down flat, inserted others along the lower edge and up the sides.

The last tack went through the arm of one of Fawcett's lieutenants, just where he had hurtled through the air at the end of his rope over at the extreme lefthand edge of the picture. A little, trailing "C. L." was the signature.

THAT afternoon at Estate Montparnasse, where I had been invited hospitably for tea, I told my kind hosts, the Maclanes, about my find. And I made it an excuse—though none was needed—to ask them to drive in for tea with me the following afternoon.

When they saw it I think it made the same impression on them that it had upon me, at first. I imagine that only their impeccable courtesy prevented their telling me that I had been gloating over something very like a chromo!

It was Miss Gertrude Maclane who first began to get the real charm of it. I noticed her leaning close and examining it very carefully.

Suddenly, as I talked with Mr. and Mrs. Maclane, there came from Miss Gertrude a little, smothered cry—an explanation almost like a sigh—but so poignant, though subdued, that her mother turned quickly toward her on hearing it. We both stepped toward her.

"What is it, Miss Gertrude?" I inquired.

"What is it, my dear?" echoed her mother.

"It's this poor creature," replied Miss Gertrude Maclane, indicating the fellow whose arm I had transfixed.

"Why—he's in agony! It's dreadful, I think! It's wonderfully done. It quite startled me, in fact. The little figures are wonderfully done, if you look at them closely. I think they must—some of them, anyhow—be portraits, just as you said yesterday, Mr. Canevin. This one, certainly, is almost uncanny."

WE ALL looked at the dangling fellow. I had not seen him since yesterday. Curious! He was not, as I had supposed, *dangling*. He was hurtling through the air; had not quite reached the end of that fatal fall from the drop where stood the hangman, a terrible, fierce fellow.

No—the rope was not yet wholly taut. That knot of seven turns had not broken the poor devil's neck. He was as alive as any of the spectators.

But it was not this new interpretation of the artist's skill, not the look of tortured horror, which had so moved Miss Gertrude. No!

What caused me to close my eyes in a spasmodic, futile effort to shut out a deeper horror, caused me to lean heavily against the table, fighting to retain some measure of my composure, was the fact that the man's expression had *changed since yesterday*. Now out of his horror-shot, protruding, agonized eyes came straight at me a look of strange reproachfulness.

And down his little, painted arm, from the place where I had driven the carpet tack through it, were running little drops of bright red blood. . . .

I opened my eyes and turned to my guests. I had pulled myself together with an effort which was like a wrench. I bowed to Mrs. Maclane.

"Shall we go down for tea?" I inquired.

Miss Gertrude lingered behind after the rest had passed out of the room. She took my arm and I could feel her slim white hand trembling.

"I think it is very dreadful, somehow, that picture," she whispered confidingly, "but oh, Mr. Canevin, it's fascinating. I wonder if 'C. L.' really was a girl. Perhaps we can find out!"

"We'll see what can be done," I replied with an attempt at lightness, and she smiled up at me most charmingly in a way she has. A lively young girl is Miss Gertrude Maclane, daughter of Old Scottish Gentry-Planters, people who had come to the island in the old days.

WHEN the Maclanes had gone after tea, I went upstairs and pulled out that tack. I will admit that I almost expected to see fresh blood flow from the wound. Nothing of the sort happened, of course.

I looked closely at the place. Red paint, put on a hundred years ago. The reproachful expression I had imagined was, too, wholly absent from the man's face. I was looking at the picture now by electric light.

The marked differences in light-effects that we get in the West Indies might well be expected to play queer optical tricks. They are a land of the imagination, the islands. Some of the original crudity, too, seemed, somehow, to have got back into the picture.

CHAPTER II

SOMETHING BESIDES PAINT

AFTER breakfast the next morning I went straight in to the picture. In this clear, raw, morning light there remained only that look of apprehension which the artist had painted in.

No agony. Certainly no reproach. Queer tricks, strange illusions, those begotten of our tropical sun!

I examined the tiny hole left by the carpet tack under a magnifying-glass. The "bloodstains" of my aroused imagination of yesterday were stains of century-old, brittle paint—probably a slip of the brush just after touching-in those flamboyant trees or a scarlet head-turban or so—mere little meaningless, incidental dabs they were, and nothing more that I was able to discover.

THAT afternoon I called upon old Mrs. Desmond, who owns Melbourne House. She is a little, faded lady of the Old Irish Gentry; of a family which has been in the West Indies since early in the eighteenth century.

She was dressed, as usual, in hot-looking black silk, with a little lace around the edges. There is about her a penumbra of veils and a suggestion of quaint, leather reticules. She has, too, that dead-white, colorless complexion of the West Indian Caucasian lady who has spent the bulk of a long lifetime avoiding the direct rays of the sun.

I told Mrs. Desmond about finding the picture, and our curiosity about the identity of the artist. She smiled at me kindly, rocking herself back and forth in an enormous Copenhagen mahogany rocking-chair the while, and fanning herself with a regularity which suggested doom.

"It was painted by my aunt, Mr. Canevin," said Mrs. Desmond, "who was Camilla Lanigan, my mother's elder sister. She died before I was born, about 1841—I'll not be positive. 'Tis said she was a remarkable woman in her day, and if you'll wait till I'm dead and gone, I'll tell you what's known about her."

"With pleasure, Mistress Desmond, and may that day be a long way off; as long as you care to have it yourself!"

"WHAT I can tell you is indeed no credit to the Lanigans and their gentry, you'll understand," continued Mrs. Desmond. "She was of a very inquiring disposition and I dare say she learned much that she would have done better to leave alone—about the doings of the blacks and all! My grandfather, Cornelius Lanigan that was, and her father, was a gentleman-merchant there in St. Thomas.

"It was from St. Thomas that James Desmond took me when we were married to live here on Santa Cruz, and I no more than a child of eighteen, Mr. Canevin. It was in 'sixty-four I was married, and all I know of my aunt Camilla Lanigan I learned from the sayings of my mother before that year when I was a girl at home.

"There was little she did not know about the Obeah of the black people, so 'tis said—nor, indeed, of the voodoo as well, belike! Their mother being long dead and my own mother the younger of the two sisters, there was no one to stop my Aunt Camilla from doing much as she liked. The black people held her in great respect, so 'twas said.

"As to the picture itself, I can tell you but little about it. It was in the house when I was born, in 'forty-six that was, and my mother had a great dislike for it. 'Twas I who would be taking it out of an old dust-box where it was kept, now and again, and frightening myself, as a child would, with the queer little figures and the hanging!

"When I was married I begged for it, and I think my mother was glad to be rid of it, for the memory of my Aunt Camilla was still in the house there in St. Thomas.

"James Desmond, my husband, would never allow it to be hung on the wall, saying that it was indelicate of a lady to have painted such

a scene. And I believe he was in the right of it, Mr. Canevin, with all respect to my Aunt Camilla!"

I thanked the dear old lady for her information as I bowed over her withered hand at parting. Her last remark was cryptic and somewhat startling:

"'Twas more than paint, belike, went into the composition of that picture, Mr. Canevin!"

I CALLED up Miss Gertrude as soon as I was back at Melbourne House.

"I have some information about the picture and the artist," said I.

"Come as early as you can manage it," said Miss Gertrude, and after dinner I started.

"Oh, Mr. Canevin," said she eagerly, when I had recounted what Mrs. Desmond had told me. "How I wish I might see it again now at once!"

"I had anticipated that," said I. "It lies on the table in the entryway."

We laid it out on the mahogany centre-table and looked down at it together in silence. At last Miss Gertrude spoke:

"What do you see now in his expression, Mr. Canevin?"

I did not need inquire in whose expression.

A baffling, elusive change appeared to have taken place now that we were looking down at him under the electric light.

"Expectation," said I slowly.

I hesitated. It was not quite expectation. Interest? Not quite that, either. I pondered the matter, the bizarre whimsicality of it making its natural appeal to my mind the while.

"Hope!" I cried at last. "And, coming through the hope, a wish!"

"Yes, yes!" cried Miss Gertrude, clasping her hands excitedly. "It—it seemed to me almost as though there were something—something he wanted to tell us!"

She hurried over these hesitating words and, now that they were spoken, there was a look of relief on her lovely face.

"Your moral courage is better than mine, Miss Gertrude," said I. "For that is what was really in the back of my mind. It seemed to me too—well, too preposterous to put into words."

Her eyes glowed with an enthusiasm almost childish. She placed her hand upon my arm.

"Do you suppose we could find out what it is?"

Her voice was very low.

"We could try," said I.

The whimsicality of the proposal had intrigued me.

"But how?" cried Miss Gertrude.

"THAT'S what I'm puzzling my poor brains about," I answered. "One cannot converse with a little figure two and one-half inches high and made of paint!

"No! We cannot just talk to him—and expect him to answer. He hasn't the—the apparatus. He's only a brittle little manikin fastened down flat on some very tender old canvas. He can't speak and he can't write. But, somehow, he does seem able to change his expression.

"If there really is something in him—something besides paint, as old Mrs. Desmond hinted—at least we're not meddling with *that* for any wicked purpose, whatever Mrs. Desmond's Aunt Camilla Lanigan may have had in mind."

"Do you remember that paralyzed old man in 'Monte Cristo'?" inquired Miss Gertrude eagerly. "Noirtier, de Villefort's father; you remember?"

"He was one of the friends of my

childhood," said I. "What about him?"

"He could move only his eyes, and yet his granddaughter 'talked' with him. She asked him questions that could be answered by 'yes' or 'no,' and he closed the right eye for one and the left for the other!"

"Yes?" said I dubiously.

"Well!" said she, looking down at the picture, "shall we try him?"

I stepped over and looked at the manikin closely.

"I'm looking to see if Mrs. Desmond's Aunt Camilla gave him ears," said I lightly. "Apparently she put 'blood' in him."

And I proceeded to tell Miss Gertrude the incident of the carpet tack.

"We'll have to work out the questions very carefully," said she.

I looked at her in amazement.

"Can you seriously mean it?" I asked.

"Look at him!" cried Miss Gertrude and put her hands over her eyes and sank down upon the sofa.

I stepped quickly toward her, alarmed.

"No, no!" she cried. "I'm all right—only startled a little. Look for yourself, if you please, Mr. Canevin."

I looked, and for the life of me I could not escape the conviction that there was a wry smile on the manikin's face.

"My God!" said I, and did not apologize.

I almost hesitate to proceed.

CHAPTER III

TWO THINGS

WELL, we sat down together after that and worked the thing out. The evening was before us. The rest of the family were dining with friends and would not be home before eleven.

It was plain to us that "he" could move, although he had not done so while anyone was actually looking at him. The fact that this last "change" had come upon his countenance in the briefest of intervals would indicate, somehow, that he could also "hear."

For it seemed plain to us in our eerie mood of that strange evening that the smile was one of satisfaction, induced by our conversation. He wanted us to try to talk to him!

We decided to formulate certain questions, ask them, then turn away and, after a short interval, look at the manikin again. The method of communication we derived from "Noirtier," as the simplest possible.

Miss Gertrude asked the first question.

"We think you wish to communicate with us," said she, in a still small voice. "We shall ask you questions, and you are to close your right eye if the answer is 'yes,' and your left if it is 'no.' Will you answer?"

Then we sat, side by side, on the sofa, watching the great clock in the corner of the drawing-room ticking off the seconds of that minute which we had decided to allow to pass before looking at him again.

It was a long, long minute, that one! At first I felt like a fool, but that feeling dissipated itself as soon as we had, together, bent over the picture at the expiration of that first minute.

The right eye had drooped in a kind of leering half-wink—precisely as though Miss Camilla Lanigan had painted it so one hundred years ago.

AFTER several long minutes of silence between us there on the sofa, I said:

"I'm going to ask the next question, if you don't mind."

She nodded.

I walked over to the table. The eyes were alike again!

"Have you more than one thing to communicate?" I inquired.

I came back to the sofa again and sat down, my eyes once more on the clock.

Again we bent over the picture.

"There's a slight droop in the right eye," said Miss Gertrude.

The manikin had answered "yes" again.

AFTER that, somehow, we felt freer. Two questions—the real ordeal of the thing—were over and past.

There was little feeling of strangeness from then on. It was precisely as though we were talking with some person of flesh and blood like ourselves, with someone not immediately present—as though we were talking over the telephone. It was something like that.

He had two things to communicate. We took thought now how to proceed. The eyes, alike, were always open and staring straight ahead whenever we approached with a new question. And so it continued through to the end.

I thought of a necessary question.

"Have you more than two things to communicate?" I asked.

"No," came the answer.

"Does the first thing concern you?" I ventured.

"Yes."

"And the second thing? Does that also concern you?

This time, when we looked for the answer, the eyes had not moved at all so far as we could tell.

I glanced up at the electric light. Our lights not infrequently change their density, go up and down, without warning. We have only the little, local electrical plants, one in each of the towns. The light appeared even enough.

We were a little nonplused, for, although I had been telling myself subconsciously all along that the whole thing was a farce, a bit of childish play, I had come by now to expect an answer!

"Perhaps it's because we asked him an unanswerable question," I suggested. "I'll try to clear it up."

"He's helping," said Miss Gertrude. "He's only showing us that it was asked wrong!"

I looked down at her and smiled, and she smiled back at me.

"Does the second thing concern more than you—that is, someone else?" I asked the pirate.

"Yes," came the answer.

"Is Mr. Canevin the other person?" asked Miss Gertrude.

I smiled again at this. If there was anything that could be construed as an answer, I certainly expected that it would be 'no.' "

The answer was "yes."

I BEGAN to feel the beginnings of a cold consternation, but I found Miss Gertrude smiling happily.

"I thought so," said she simply.

Women, most of them certainly, are beyond me! It was a woman who had painted this picture!

Miss Gertrude hastened to ask another question.

"Do you want to tell Mr. Canevin what he can do for you first, and then what you're going to do for him in return?"

"Yes."

"Do you wish to be released from something?"

"Yes, he does," reported Miss Gertrude, who was now asking the questions, I being seated for the time being alone on the sofa.

"Do you wish to pass out of existence?"

She nodded over to me to show me that he did.

"Can we accomplish that for you?"

"He says we can."

We were making progress, it appeared! She clapped her hands gaily. All her gravity had disappeared. It *was* merely a game to her, then. I had almost begun to suspect that she had been taking the thing seriously.

"I thought it would come out more or less like that!" she announced. Then:

"The poor, poor man!" said she softly, and I wondered once more.

She returned to the picture and looked down at it for a long time.

"Is there anything else that can be done for you?" she inquired.

There wasn't, it seemed.

I WILL summarize, for brevity's sake, the series of questions which followed and the "replies."

We were to find out how to obtain the "reward." Then we were to ask no further questions. I was to take the picture home, put it back on the wall, and destroy it the next morning—tomorrow.

All this seemed to me, on the sofa, grotesque, unintelligible. I was almost becoming bored with this seemingly foolish play, but nothing would stop Gertrude Maclane.

"Is it a material reward for Mr. Canevin?"

"Yes," came the answer to this one. And, going over and looking down at the manikin, such is human nature—or our somewhat unstable lighting system on Santa Cruz—that it seemed even to me in that mood, that I could discern the merest ghost of a twisted grin on that strange little face beneath the looming, cruelly twisted knot of hangman's rope.

I will bring what seemed to me an increasingly absurd performance to its conclusion. I left, with definite instructions to dig in the northeast corner of the cellar under Melbourne House—that cellar once devoted to the housing of materials for planters' punches and sangaree, and now fallen to a low estate of habitation for spiders and perhaps an occasional scorpion thriving in its ancient dust.

CHAPTER IV

RELEASE

MY brain, I will confess it, was in a kind of whirl as I drove home that night from Montparnasse House. When I had obediently hung the picture back in its place on my workroom wall, I took a good, long, searching look at it. It seemed as wooden, as laboriously limned, as amateurish, as on that day when I had rescued it from the dustroom.

There were the strutting St. Thomas gentry and merchants, a lordly group of aristocrats, who had come out to see Captain Fawcett die. There, too, were their silken and bemuslined ladyfolk; the Danish soldiers in their boxlike, Frederick-the-Great uniforms; the swarming, popeyed negroes; the hangman, Fawcett and his two mates. . . .

I went to bed. That had been a strange, weird evening.

To dig under my own house. It was too much. And I had promised Gertrude Maclane to do so!

Promised, too, to destroy this picture the next morning. Awkward, that! Gentlemen do not build bonfires in their back yards in the West Indies.

Our very cooking is done on charcoal-pots, or on an occasional oil-stove. We have no gas, and coal we know only as a commodity for fuel-

ing ships. It would have to be a coal-pot.

That is the idea I carried with me into sleep, the last thing I remembered until the sun, the bright, morning sun, saluted me awake.

"Keep a fire in the coal-pot, Esmerelda, if you please," I called through the bathroom door. "I want to use it myself a little later."

I STEPPED into the workroom to take down the picture. I had promised to destroy it, I would keep my word.

I looked at it, for the last time, under that clear, pitiless, blazing morning sunlight.

Probably the nervous strain had been heavier than I had imagined. I managed to control myself. I made no *shandramadan*—which is the blacks' term for foolishness or rascality! I avoided, too, by holding on tight to the table's edge, a *caffoon*, which means a fall.

For "he" was not, it seemed now, and could never indeed have been, if paint is paint, hurtling through the air in his last instant of life, so to express it. The rope as I looked at it was unmistakably taut.

That deadly knot of seven turns of good, new manila rope must already have struck home under one of those strange little ears into which, last night, Gertrude Maclane and I had. . . .

I set my face down for a moment in my shaking hands. The eyes of the figure which we had watched last night—his eyes were, unmistakably, closed like those of his two companions in wickedness. He had joined Captain Fawcett of the fine, plum-colored, laced coat and Hessian boots.

Our pirate really *swung* now. He was dead—d e l i v e r e d, it came through my shuddering mind, from those uncanny sorceries of Camilla Lanigan, she who had been so strangely respected by the black people of St. Thomas; she who knew their Obeah and their voodoo.

I PULLED down the picture a moment later with a firm hand and laid it out flat on my work table. I cut it into convenient strips for burning in a coal-pot. Some of the old, brittle paint flaked off in this process, and this I gathered up to the final crumb on a sheet of paper.

But for the most part my penknife went cleanly through the old canvas.

Downstairs I found that Esmerelda had gone after the morning's supply of ice for the drinking water with the large thermos bottle. But a glowing coal-pot stood on the floor of the little stone gallery outside the kitchen door.

Into this I poured the fragments of the chipped paint and watched them bubble and hiss. I thrust in the strips, one after another. They curled, caught, and were swiftly consumed.

Then I stirred the charcoal and a few sparks came out. Not a vestige of Camilla Lanigan's picture remained.

I should have to wait until Esmerelda was gone for the afternoon, and dig in that cellar in the hottest part of the day among the ghosts of wine-barrels and demijohns. I stepped out into the yard to investigate.

In a shed I found an ancient spade and, best of all, a thing like a mattock which might have been dug up on the site of Persepolis. These I carried down into the dim, cool cellar. With the spade I knocked loose the hooks of a hurricane shutter. That would dissipate the slight, musty smell and also provide a better light for me that afternoon.

Esmerelda was still bargaining among the bebustled vendors in the

market when I returned upstairs to wash my hands.

AFTER lunch I waited until I heard Esmerelda leave. I watched the good soul as she walked down the hill, through slanted jalousies. And when she passed out of sight around the corner by St. Paul's Church, I locked the front door and descended into the cellar. It was fairly cool and hardly musty at all. I hung my coat on an ancient, hand-wrought nail and set to work.

The hard-pounded earth came away reluctantly as I picked at it, loosening the surface for a hole about six feet square. Alternately with this I shoveled out the loose dirt, placing it well to one side, so that it would not run back.

It was two when I began. The fort clock had chimed three-thirty a few minutes before I struck something metallic. It took me at least fifteen minutes more before I had uncovered a small iron trunk in the corner of the large square I had opened.

I broke the rusty lock with the edge of the spade, raised it, and there before me—and such is human nature that I must say I was more surprised than amazed, at the very first—lay, neatly stacked in rouleaus from which the ancient cotton cloth fell away in shreds and flakes, row after row of gold coin—all the coinage of romance: doubloons, of course; ancient American eagles; Louis d'Or; even a few East Indian Mohurs!

In a side compartment by themselves lay, carefully packed in, an assortment of jeweled implements, jeweled chalices and patens from the loot, doubtless, of those rich Spanish Churches of Central and South American seaside cities, perhaps even from Porto Rico and Santo Domingo: jewelry, much of it monogrammed; gold plate such as had graced the hospitable boards of many a fabulously rich sugar baron of the islands of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

At the very bottom of this separate compartment, which was of the capacity of about one-third the trunk's cubical contents, lay, flattened and stiff, a sack of oiled silk. I picked it up and had to untie the leather pouch-strings, so well was it preserved.

I looked in and then thrust in my right hand, and even in the comparatively dim light of the old cellar there leaped out at me the myriad coruscations of cut jewels, throwing back the light they had not known for fully a century. My hand was full of jewels, and I had hardly taken off the edge—the very topmost.

Diamonds, rubies, sapphires, blazing emerals. A king's, an emperor's ransom here, in the cellar of Marlborough House.

The pirate! He had not misled us. What, in God's name, did it mean!

WELL, I had other things to think of besides mooning over *that* problem there in the cellar, with a fair-sized fortune held in my hand and God knows how much else there in the iron trunk—gold, vessels, jewels.

I spent the next half-hour carrying the trunk's contents up to my bedroom in the wholly unromantic iron pail in which Esmerelda boils the drinking water. I deposited them all, in a kind of order—gold coin all together, vessels and jewels separate—in two bureau drawers, turning out shirts and collars for this accommodation.

I locked the drawers, stuffed the shirts into the mahogany wardrobe, placed the bureau key in my pocket

and returned to the cellar. There, by leaving open the old trunk's lid, I was able in another half-hour of feverish work, which left me literally dripping and soaking, to get back and roughly to pound down all the dry earth I had taken out.

When I had tossed the spade and mattock behind some ancient lumber, closed and hooked the hurricane shutter and returned to my bedroom to strip off my soaking clothes, before the most refreshing bath I can remember, it was precisely nine minutes before five. And Esmerelda would not be back until five precisely.

CHAPTER V

COURTEOUS INTEREST

I REMEMBER sitting, about six-thirty, fresh and cool now, in white drill, waiting for Esmerelda to announce dinner, with the necklace of emeralds which I had taken out from the rest as soon as I saw it, to give to Miss Gertrude Maclane.

I had telephoned to Montparnasse House, and explained to her that I must see her as soon as possible. She had arranged that I was to call that evening after dinner.

Among other matters, I had been considering my duty with respect to this find. It involved certain responsibilities, I began to see. I resolved to return anything that might prove identifiable.

Apparently this was the hoard of some master pirate, possibly even that of Fawcett himself. Its disappearance, or rather the fact that it had never been discovered, was one of the standard mysteries of the islands. How, if that were the case, it had got itself under Marlborough House was apparently an insoluble mystery.

I may as well mention here that the restoration has proved an actuality in one or two cases. A dozen gold spoons, monogrammed, have gone back to the representatives of the Despard family in Christiansted. And a lovely old "tulip" chalice, filigreed, with its attendant paten, all the way to Valparaiso.

I dined that evening with the necklace loose in the pocket of my drill jacket. I fear I made only a sketchy meal.

Esmerelda seemed disturbed. She thought, good soul, as she told me the next morning, that the *crustadas* of shell-fish had not been up to standard! I had not, really, been certain what I was eating.

ON my arrival at Montparnasse House I felt a note of constraint. It is very hard to describe what I mean. I can only say I *felt* it. Santa Crucian moods and similar delicacies of feeling are most difficult to describe!

I remembered that I had called three times in the past four days! I was not unwelcome. It was not that. Otherwise Robert Maclane, Esq., would have waited perhaps fifteen minutes, instead of five, before having a swizzel served.

But—it was conveyed to me so subtly that I despair of making the matter clear, that Mr. and Mrs. Maclane, while recognizing me as an equal and a friend, were not quite clear as to what I was up to! They were not, precisely, objecting to my coming so often.

They wanted me to know they thought it unusual. That is the best I can do by way of saying how I felt.

Mr. Maclane and I conversed about new kinds of canes which were being tried out; about the labor situation; about the pink boll-worm and how certain Montserrat cotton planters were meeting its ravages;

about the newly inaugurated onion crop; about the perennial subject of the rainfall.

The ladies, of course, joined in from time to time as Victorian ladies did, and as Crucian ladies do to this day. But the burden of that evening's conversation lay upon Mr. Maclane and myself.

Not so much as the overt flicker of an eyelash served to indicate the natural curiosity of my hosts as to why I was paying their hospitable estate house so many visits. But—I could *feel* it, all the time, circulating in my blood!

IT was half-past nine when Miss Gertrude took her courage in her hands, looked straight at me, and said:

"May I speak with you aside for a few moments, Mr. Canevin? Father and mother will excuse us."

I rose and followed her out onto the great gallery which runs all along the front of Montparnasse House. And I knew, in my blood and bones, that Mr. and Mrs. Maclane did not so much as glance at one another when we had left the drawing-room. I could hear their voices as they conversed quietly together, all the time we were on the gallery.

Miss Gertrude led me to its extreme end and there, in the mellow light of a full moon and to the intoxicating accompaniment of jessamine and night-tuberose odors, faced me.

"I have something for you," said I, and laid the necklace across her hands. "This is for you, Miss Gertrude, with all my gratitude and all my admiration."

"But—I cannot accept this," she said, looking at the emeralds as they glowed in the moonlight.

"You will wear it, I was hoping, on your wedding day."

"But, Mr. Canevin, I am not considering being married. I am only nineteen."

"But you will be married some day—God send, happily. Keep the necklace and bring it out when that delightful young gentleman who may be half-way worthy of you comes along. Let it be a portion of your trousseau."

"But—I am not interested in 'delightful young gentlemen,' Mr. Canevin."

This conversation, it seemed to me, had got rather far away from what Miss Gertrude had summoned me out there on the gallery to talk about.

She was speaking again.

"I do not see why you should suggest such a thing to me, Mr. Canevin."

Women! I should never understand them! This, at that moment, I felt instinctively, hopelessly. I remembered, sharply, that almost telepathic feeling I have mentioned on my arrival.

"I am sure I ask your pardon if I have offended you," I said lamely and stood aside, waiting for her to precede me back into the drawing-room.

I bowed slightly to indicate that I was waiting for her to pass. I think I even may have made a slight, indicative motion of the hand.

BUT she did not move, and I looked down at her, troubled, vaguely puzzled. Was this the simple, sweet Miss Gertrude who had entered into the comedy of that picture with an almost childish enthusiasm?

That picture! I think I shuddered slightly. She reached out the necklace toward me, but I did not take it back. With the strangest, most poignant look on her face, she was speaking again.

Like "Annie Laurie's," her voice is low and sweet. All the phrases

of that ballad of sentimental nonsense, as I was suddenly reminded, looking down at her, fit her like a glove.

"I think you have failed to understand me, and that is why you are vexed, Mr. Canevin. You see—I cannot accept your gift. I am no longer a child, you will remember, and such a gift could come only from a near relative, or—or . . ."

She looked down. Her courage had given out. I saw her face, red as a red rose in the faint whiteness of that pouring moonlight.

The delicate, moaning coo of a disturbed wood dove came through the silent mahogany trees, and a little, faint puff of the evening trade wind came wandering across from the sea, across acres of sweet grass.

Light came to me then and blinded me.

"——Or one who is to be your husband," I finished for her, bending my head toward her. She did not move, and I reached out and took both her dear hands in mine, where they lay like lilies. The necklace hung across her wrists between us.

It was, suddenly, as though "Annie Laurie," played very softly and sweetly and yet, somehow, madly, played by many well-tuned violins and fairy horns, surged all about me, and it went to my head like strong wine.

"And will you let me be that one?" I asked her quietly.

She left her hands where they were, and raised her lovely face and looked at me, all her shame gone now, and I took her into my arms. . . .

A LITTLE after we went back into the drawing-room. Mr. and Mrs. Maclane were chatting quietly, precisely as we had left them. I bowed to both of them.

"I must not delay the happiness I have in informing you," said I, and the words seemed to come to me with a clarity almost uncanny—the right words, for such an announcement—"that I expect to have the honor of becoming your son-in-law."

But, assure you, no one, not even a Canevin, can get ahead of a real Crucian of the Old Scottish Gentry when it comes to these matters of courtesy.

"We are happy to welcome you into the family, Gerald," said Mrs. Maclane, without the flicker of an eyelash.

She rose and made me a quaint, Old World courtesy, and I bowed in return as she resumed her chair.

Mr. Maclane took his wife's hand in his and said:

"My wife has spoken for both of us, Mr. Canevin."

"Gerald has given me this," said Gertrude, and laid the necklace, blazing now under the electric chandelier, in her mother's lap.

Mrs. Maclane examined it with interest, polite interest. Its value would easily have purchased Estate Montparnasse—yes, and several other contiguous estates thrown in.

"It is very kind of him," said she, and handed the necklace back to her daughter.

Gertrude gave it to her father to examine. He looked at it with much the same type of merely courteous interest, and then clasped the lovely thing about his daughter's neck, which is "like the swan," as "Annie Laurie" has it. He kissed her gravely on her white forehead.

"We must have in a bottle of champagne to drink your health," said he, and paused to bow to me again as he left the room to get it.

CHAPTER VI

REQUIESCAT IN PACE

OF course I told Mrs. Desmond about everything. But no information could I derive from her that would throw any light on anything. She would only say:

"After I am dead, Mr. Canevin!"

But on the matter of the picture's destruction she waxed eloquent.

"God be praised," said she, "that the fearful thing is no more! 'Twas my poor mother, God rest her soul, that was always wishful of having it destroyed and never daring; and as for me, Mr. Canevin, as I've told you, there was more than paint went into it.

But I believe every word. 'Tis enough of my Aunt Camilla's capabilities that I've heard about to leave no doubt in my mind. After I'm dead, Mr. Canevin—after I'm dead, and not before!"

And that was all we were able to learn.

WE had been married less than two months; the restoration of my estate was only just beginning to be under way, when Mrs. Desmond departed this life at the age of seventy-six.

The English Church was full—St. Paul's—and so, too, was the churchyard itself, for virtually the entire island turned out to pay its last respects to one of its most notable old inhabitants, a member of the Old Island Gentry who pass, these days, one by one.

Gertrude and I had come back on foot from the funeral—it is only a step to Marlborough House, where we were living until the estate-house should be ready, from the funeral—to be met by a young colored fellow, a clerk in Lawyer Esperson's employ. He handed me a long envelope and asked for a receipt, which I gave him.

The envelope, addressed to me, was one of Lawyer Esperson's. I tore it open, and within was a brief document, also addressed to me, and in the fine, beautifully formed, almost continental handwriting of Mistress Desmond herself.

I CALLED Gertrude, and we sat down together and I read it out:

DEAR MR. CANEVIN:

I have left instructions with Esperson that this is to be handed to you after my burial. I told you that I would clear up certain matters for you after I was gone.

There are two mysteries connected. One is why I would not touch a penny's value of what you discovered under Melbourne House. The other is how the evil takings of a "Freetrader" could come there, to the residence of a respectable family.

I shall hope to clear up both of these. As to how it was done, God—and Satan—know. I cannot tell you that.

But this much I can, and will, tell you.

Even before my time, we of the gentry have been constrained to marry among ourselves. It's new blood, like your own, these islands are needing. I hope you will remain, now that you are to be married, and to one of a blood as good as your own.

For the reason I mention, we are mostly related, like royalty!

I was courted by my cousin, James Desmond, whom I married. It was the uncle of my husband, Saul Macartney, who sought to marry my Aunt Camilla Lanigan in the generation before mine. This Saul was the only living child of his father, Thomas Macartney, who lived here on Santa Cruz, and was a merchant and shipowner in the island trade.

It is because James Desmond was his nephew that Melbourne House came to us by inheritnce. It belonged to Saul Macartney.

This young gentleman was accustomed to go about the islands in charge of his father's vessel, the *Hope*. And in the intervals of these voyages he would be courting my Aunt Camilla Lanigan in St. Thomas. A young man he was, so it is said, with but little of the fear of God, and none of the love, in his heart.

When his father died, leaving him Melbourne House, the ships, three sugar estates and a grand store here in Frederiksted, he was not content to marry my Aunt Camilla and settle down.

Off he went in the *Hope* again before his father was well settled in his grace. And on that very voyage, from which my Aunt

Camilla had sought to dissuade him, the *Hope* was captured off Caracas by Fawcett himself.

Saul Macartney, willing as always to turn to his own advantage what might betide, "joined" Fawcett and rose to be second in command to the bloodiest villain that ever scourged the Caribbean.

Now, I am thinking, you begin to see light. The connection with the picture. What depended on that bitter fact?

It had not been known to me before you dug it up that treasure had been placed under Melbourne House. But consider, Mr. Canevin, where better? It was Saul Macartney's property and only came, indeed, into the hands of my husband, James Desmond, his nephew, on Macartney's disgraceful death on the gallows in St. Thomas.

Nothing could have been easier than for him to come ashore here, and Captain Fawcett with him belike, and do as he pleased on his own property. The people would bow to the ground before a "Freetrader" in those days, and the fat of the land was not too good for them. Many had their fine houses ashore. Was not Henry Morgan himself knighted and made Leftenant Governor of Jamaica?

Saul Macartney went and came as he wished, and even sought to continue his courtship with my Aunt Camilla Lanigan. It was that which roused the bitter hatred of her against him, Mr. Canevin, and—woe betide the man that roused my Aunt Camilla Lanigan to hate!

For she knew how to hate, and how to make her hatred count, and may God our Heavenly Father have mercy on her soul.

ANN JANE DESMOND.

THAT was all. Granting it was true—and it was plausible enough, to be sure—it cleared up much that had been obscure; the identity of the pirate mate, for example.

But, as Mrs. Desmond herself had said, it could not clear up how the thing had been brought about. Granted that Camilla Lanigan had acquired skill in black magic, and that is a great deal to grant in any such case, or any case at all, the rest fitted together like the halves of a trysting ring. I saw it all, from that point of view, and I shuddered internally.

I raised my head and looked at my dear wife. Her eyes were shining, and there was in them rather more than a suspicion of tears.

"What a vengeance!" she said, in her low, sweet voice. "Saul Macartney choosing the life of a Freetrader as against that of a decent merchant! Reduced to what appeared on that canvas!

"Well—he is released now, Gerald. *We* released him. And he has rewarded us. I think we should pray for the repose of his soul. He is a century behind the others in Purgatory!"

"You believe——" said I.

"If I were not certain you would call me 'Victorian,' my dear wife smiled through that suspicion of tears, "I should say:

" 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio!' "

"We shall have to let it go at that, I imagine," said I, "but I am going to give St. Paul's Church a complete new set of altar hangings in brocades, with some such idea as you have suggested."

"Which idea?" inquired my wife.

"For the repose of his soul," I answered.

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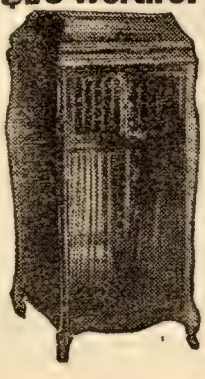

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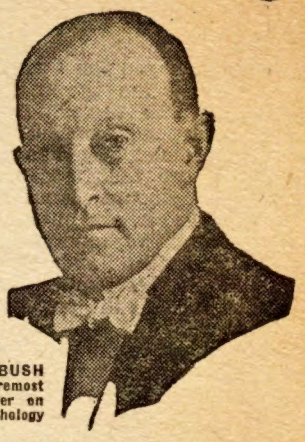

DAVID V. BUSH
America's Foremost Author-Lecturer on Practical Psychology

THOUSANDS upon thousands have been turned away from the great theatres and auditoriums in Chicago, San Francisco, Seattle, Denver, Boston, and practically every great city in America where Dr. Bush has been lecturing.

Those who were ill had been shown how to become well and strong by a method to which other mental science movements were as the first step in a mammoth, far-reaching stairway.

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AN ASTOUNDING NEW POWER

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- Psycho-Analysis and the Subconscious
- How to Have Amazing Memory
- How to Destroy Fear—Man's Worst Enemy—The Unseen World
- What Is Love and How to Keep It
- How to Be Popular
- How to Overcome Failure and Adverse Environment
- How to Be Beautiful Through Mysterious Force
- Vibration—How to Win Success
- How to Develop Personality
- How to Conquer Illness
- Poverty a Disease—How to Overcome It
- How to Double Your Efficiency
- VISUALIZATION—How to Make Your Dreams Come True
- The Mastery of Fate
- How to Use Suggestion for Health, Success and Happiness
- The Greatest Law in the Universe, Just Lately Discovered, and How to Use It
- What the World Owes You and How to Get It
- After This Life What—What Is God?
- Smile, Smile, Smile
- Psychology of Health—Building the Body Beautiful
- Long Life and Full of Pep

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Dr. Bush's sole idea in giving these lectures is the same idea that actuated him in his earlier days before he had discovered this amazing new force. Then as an earnest and brilliant young minister of the Gospel he had refused honors and financial returns in order to apply his efforts where they would do good to the greatest number. His lectures are given for the same reason—to teach this new force to everyone who will learn. And to reach still more people he has incorporated his lectures in an absorbingly interesting book, 'Applied Psychology and Scientific Living," which will be sent, on FREE TRIAL, to any earnest seeker after knowledge. Luther Burbank said, "Applied Psychology appears to me the most practical and useful work which has been published on these and similar subjects."

WHEN YOU NEED THIS BOOK

Are you nervous or depressed? Do you feel old? Have you lost your grip? Have you a worrying disposition? Have you a personality that fails to attract others? Are you timid? Are you misunderstood? Do you lack the aggressiveness necessary to bring you position and power? Are you in ill health? Have you any chronic disease?

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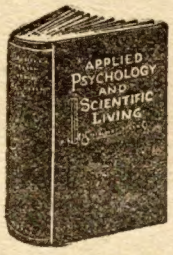

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